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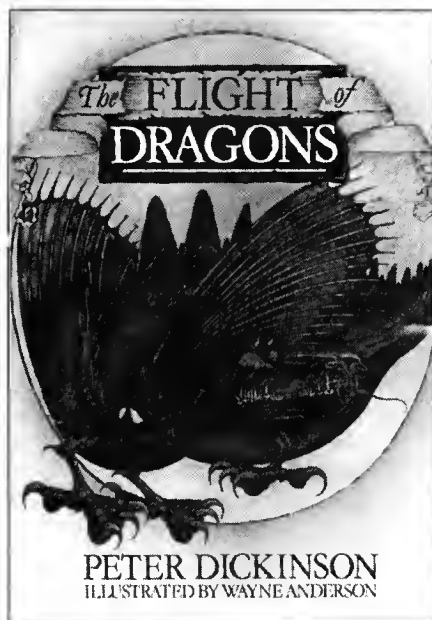
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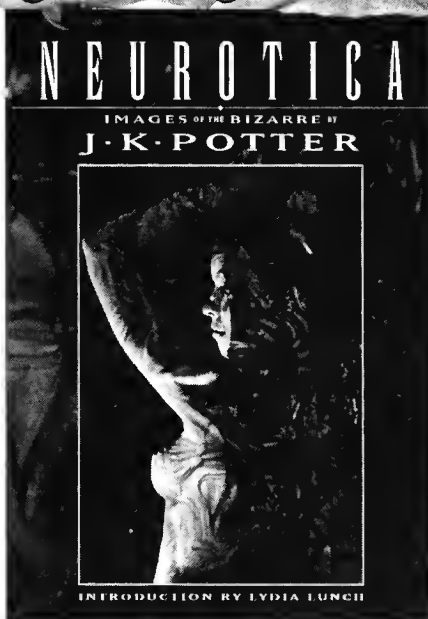
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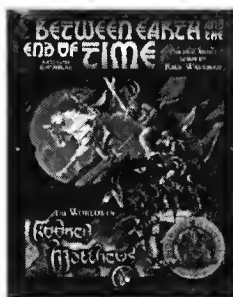
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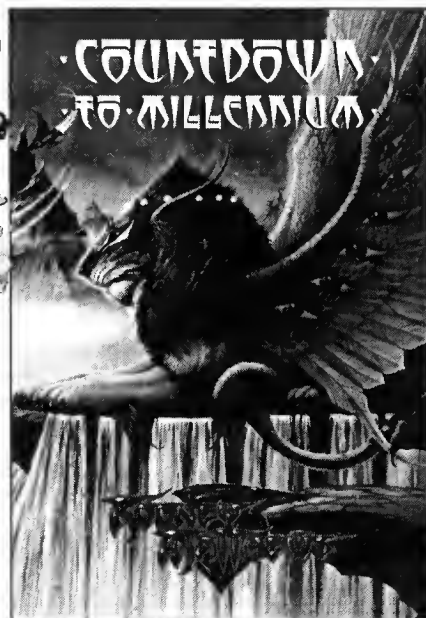
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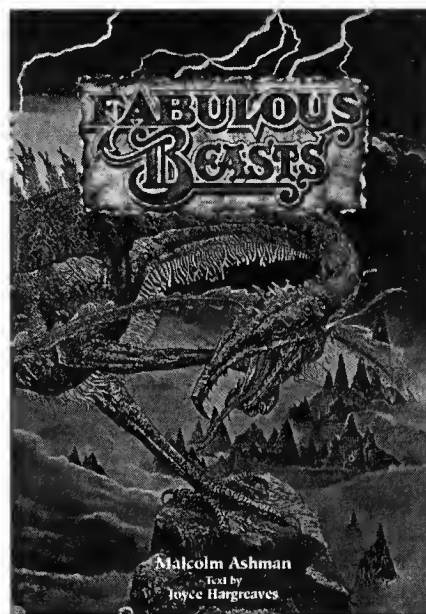
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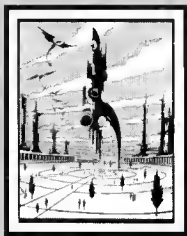
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interZone

January 1997

115

science fiction & fantasy

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Dear Editors:

At the risk of calling down the wrath of every telefantasy fan I would like to offer a reply to Mr Baumgart (*Interzone* 112).

I don't believe it is merely blind prejudice that leads some reviewers to denigrate spinoff novels. There are reasons, the most important of which is that less imagination is involved. I don't by any means say that there is none, but a lot of the hard slogging experienced by writers of "original" science fiction and fantasy has already been done. This is also why sharecropping is so frowned upon. In both cases the initial spark of an idea, the groundwork, is done by someone else. Writers such as Vonda McIntyre, Kevin Anderson and Paul Cornell do not have to create the central characters in their spinoffs, nor the conventions within which those characters act. The creative teams of the various TV or movie companies have already done that for them. In some cases they don't have to create the monsters either.

They can tinker, of course. They can show more than the TV show has time for, they can prequel, sequel, they can combine in new and exciting ways. My experience with spinoffs is largely centred around Doctor Who, so you must forgive me if my examples are a little one-sided. Virgin Publishing's "New Adventures" series is at its best when attempting to break down the conventions producer Sidney Newman (*et al*) placed on the show. But to do this the authors have had to take such radical steps as leaving out the Doctor entirely (*Time's Crucible*, for example) to almost universal cries of "It's just not cricket (Doctor Who)!" from the fan press.

Yes: the inclusion of other characters from outside the series in the new novels can be very entertaining, but does it show anything other than that the author is more widely read and has a talent for splicing? Sherlock Holmes is as subject to the conventions laid down by Conan Doyle as James Tiberius Kirk is to those of Gene Roddenberry (*et al*).

Perhaps my cynicism is getting the better of me, but I would contend that most spinoffs aren't actually that well conceived or that well written. Publishing companies have to rely less on the individual merits of the authors or books involved because the series sells the books for them. What a wonderful publishing opportunity, to be offered the rights to a show that is a household name in most countries of the world. An almost surefire moneyspinner. Far more easy to sell than a first novel by a new sf or fantasy author

(such as Ken MacLeod's *Star Fraction*; critically fêted but difficult to promote) because it has *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Doctor Who* or, more currently, *The X-Files* on the cover. The publishers tend to be lazy, and their rush to produce a new surefire moneyspinner every month must mean cutting creative corners along the way.

This is not always the case. I freely admit to making sweeping generalizations. There are conventions in all sf and fantasy. There are those who would say that most fantasy doorstops are Tolkien with the names changed; and in some cases they would be right. Not always, just as some sharecrops are the genuine meeting of two equal minds and some TV spinoffs are more than just interesting exercises in continuity.

I am glad that magazines such as *Locus*, *SFX* and yourselves spend more time on the "original" fiction. There are always authors who must be covered despite needing no coverage to help them (Eddings, Donaldson, Pratchett) but there are hundreds of others (even Arthur C. Clarke Award-winners like, most recently, Paul J. McAuley) who write spellbinding, imaginative and, yes, original fiction but who can't rely on a TV programme or the marketing departments of the major publishers to sell it for them (Tricia Sullivan, Jack McDevitt and Nicola Griffith are other examples).

Finally, does not Mr Baumgart realize that his closing comment might be used against him? If these resources are being consumed, and all this money spent, shouldn't we have something truly special to show for it?

David Burrows
Camberley, Surrey

Editor: *Agreed, agreed. The trouble is, enthusiasts of TV sf seem to outnumber those of written sf by a wide margin; even this magazine's readership seems to consist in large part of people who are glued to the box when they're not reading (see the following letter, or those in our last issue). Television is undoubtedly the most powerful medium for mass-market fiction today (the movies like to think they are, but they're not, any more). How can we compete? We'd like to think that our stories can compete with TV, in all sorts of ways, but we're well aware that they'll never reach the same size of audience. As far as the magazine's non-fiction is concerned, we have no objection to some of it making reference to TV (and TV spinoffs); but it would be nice to see our more TV-obsessed letter-writers referring to a wider range of material. We received no letters about the late Dennis Potter's final TV serial, Cold Lazarus*

(1996), even though it was pure sf; and so far no one has written to us praising or damning the BBC TV serial adaptation of Iain Banks's novel *The Crow Road* (not sf, but surely of interest to many sf readers)...

Dear Editors:

I have never been one to rate sf on television (or film for that matter) very highly. Although I have watched and enjoyed a great deal of TV sf in my time, I've always considered it to be very much a poor relation of the sf novel. That said, I must admit to being an avid follower of both *Babylon 5* and the various *Star Trek* spinoffs. After reading Nick Laury's letter and David Pringle's answer in issue 111, I feel that I must make a contribution in defence of *Babylon 5*.

B-5 hasn't received so much praise (or "hype" as Nick Laury prefers to call it) and such a loyal fall following simply because it has a five-year story arc. Its more down to the sheer quality of the story. In fact *B-5* hasn't actually received anything like the attention or exposure in the UK that it should have (largely due to its early evening time slot on Channel 4) considering how good it is.

Never before in the history of sf has a story of such scope, complexity and thematic depth been told in the medium of television. The story not only encompasses the events that take place during the five-year story arc, but also places those events in the context of a thousand years of history and at least 20 years of possible future events (from the characters' point of view). If *B-5* had been written as a series of novels rather than a TV series it would have been hailed as one of the great works of genre fiction in recent years, ranking alongside the likes of Dan Simmons's "Hyperion Cantos," Iain Banks's "Culture" novels and perhaps even Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

It is perhaps too easy to compare *B-5* with *Deep Space Nine*, considering that the one major factor that both series have in common is that they are set on a space station. I can see the relevance to *DS-9* of David Pringle's maxim that "all TV fiction, whatever the format or genre, aspires to the condition of the soap opera": its continuing story line has the same kind of "make it up as you go along" feel to it. *B-5*, however, may be the exception that proves the rule. It seems to me that *DS-9* is mainly about the way in which the characters react to/come to terms with/overcome the events and

problems presented to them in the story. *B-5* is character-driven in a different way. It is not so much about how the story affects the characters and more about the contribution that each character makes to the story. I would say that *DS-9* is a typical example of TV sf which owes a lot to the soap-opera format, whereas the *B-5* storyline has much more in common with epic fantasy and space opera in literature than with anything on TV.

B-5 of course, like anything else, has its faults. The acting at times has left a bit to be desired and the dialogue has sometimes seemed a bit stilted and clichéd (particularly in some of the early episodes), although it can also be stunningly good in these areas as well, and some of the minor single-episode storylines have simply not been very good, but thankfully examples of these faults have been relatively few and far between. In my opinion, overall, *Babylon 5* is the best sf series that I have ever seen, and at its best is at least as good as any TV drama you care to mention. The icing on the cake is that its CGI effects are much more impressive than any major film I've seen recently, including *Independence Day*, let alone anything else on TV. Its recent Hugo was very well deserved.

Bob Steele
Edinburgh

Dear Editors:

I don't often have a lot to say about artwork, but I was less than happy with Maurizio Manzieri's cover for *Interzone* 113. The joke is a very old one; but, far worse, it lacks internal logic. What has happened to the female-identity robot's nipples? I can imagine no reasonably humanoid placement, whether you presume they're supposed to be covered or not, which allows the cut of the dress and the curve of the breast both to make sense. Moreover, the deltoid muscle seems to connect in a way which contravenes mechanics and experience in equal measure; if you doubt me, try getting someone (preferably someone you know rather well) to adopt the same pose – unless I'm being thick, of course; what can be seen of her ear doesn't seem to belong to the rest of her either... Ah, well. Maybe that's what it's all about – brilliant circuitry in a cut-price box.

Betka Wight
Bedford

Dear Editors:

Some years ago, you published a very useful index to your first 50 issues. Any chance of a follow-on, covering the next 60-odd issues, either published in hard copy or available electronically, please?

Best of luck – *Interzone* still beats

Some congratulations are in order, and some thanks. Firstly, congratulations to *Interzone* contributors **Christopher Priest** and **Gwyneth Jones** on their spectacular wins in this year's World Fantasy Awards (nominated by the members of the World Fantasy Convention, held in Schaumburg, Illinois, USA, in early November). Chris Priest scooped the best novel award for *The Prestige*, an extract from which (entitled "In a Flash") appeared in our issue 99. *The Prestige*, already winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Award, is by no means a conventional fantasy novel: it makes a heartening choice. Gwyneth Jones won two awards, for best short story, "The Grass Princess," and for best collection, *Seven Tales and a Fable* (the former appeared in the latter). Gwyneth's book, an American small-press production from Edgewood Press, was reviewed in these pages by Paul Brazier (issue 108). There was also a special World Fantasy Award for the late **Richard Evans**, the popular and



we'd be grateful if readers could bend their minds, over the coming weeks, to rating the past year's stories, articles and illustrations. Let us know your thoughts on the contents of issues 103 to 114 inclusive (no need to wait until you've read the present issue, as it will count towards next year's poll).

We'd appreciate it if readers (especially those who are renewing their subscriptions) could send us answers to the following questions. Just write or type your replies on any piece of paper and send them to us before the deadline of **1st March 1997**. We'll report the results later in the spring. Any further comments about the magazine, suggestions for further improvements, etc., would also be most welcome.

most of the rest of the field for interest and innovation and information.
Tim Brandt
St Ives, Cambs.

Editor: We have a computerized index, covering stories, articles and book reviews too, for all issues of *Interzone* up to number 111 (and this is being updated regularly). Readers who are interested in buying a copy from us on disc are welcome to do so at £3 each inland (including postage and packing), or £4 each overseas. We

Interface



highly-regarded sf/fantasy editor at UK publishers Victor Gollancz.

Thanks are due to writer/editor **Nicholas Royle** and to designer **John Oakey** for their work on the last issue of *Interzone*, number 114. The usual team was able to sit back for a month (well, almost) and let those two get on with it, and they produced some provocative results – which readers can pass their opinions on straight away, if they wish, in this year's popularity poll (see below). This was our second guest-edited issue, following **Charles Platt's** interesting issue 94 (and not counting our swap-overs with Charles Ryan's *Aboriginal SF*, number 47, and Paul Brazier's *SF Nexus*, number 88). What do you think? Is it an experiment we should go on repeating? Do let us know. Meanwhile, it's that time of year again –

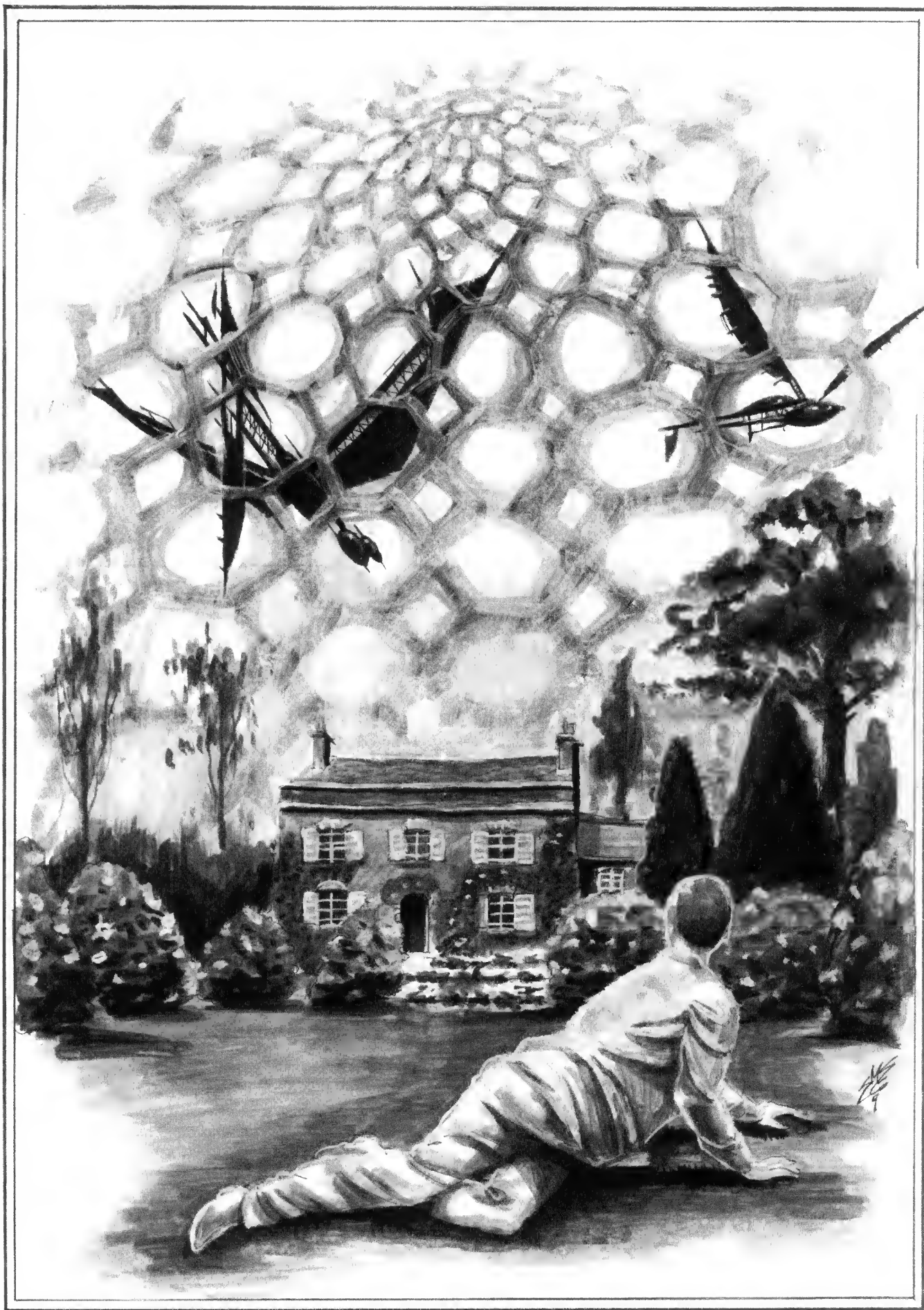
Interzone 1996 Popularity Poll

This is the January 1997 issue, mailed in December 1996. As before,

- 1) Which stories in *Interzone* issues 103-114 inclusive (i.e. those with a 1996 cover date) did you particularly like?
- 2) Which stories in *Interzone* issues 103-114 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?
- 3) Which artists' illustrations (including covers) in *Interzone* issues 103-114 inclusive did you particularly like?
- 4) Which artists' illustrations (including covers) in *Interzone* issues 103-114 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?
- 5) Which non-fiction items in *Interzone* issues 103-114 inclusive did you particularly like?
- 6) Which non-fiction items in *Interzone* issues 103-114 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?

David Pringle

can send it out on an IBM-compatible disc, either in WordPerfect 5.1 or in ASCII files (please specify which you prefer). Meanwhile, in fairness to those who have access to the internet, we should point out that various people have already made partial *Interzone* indices available on-line, free of charge. Go to <http://www.sff.net/locus/> and follow the various links shown there. You'll find plenty of information to delight you, courtesy of Locus editor Charles N. Brown, his colleague William Contento, and others...



‘NOTHING COULD BE MORE ALIEN.’



THE BLACK BLOOD OF THE DEAD.

Being the sequel to the popular novella
'The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires'

By BRIAN STABLEFORD.

Illustrated by SMS

PART ONE.



Introduction

In *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires* the anthropologist Edward Copplestone invited a company of the most intelligent men in London to hear an account of his experiments with a drug that enabled him to cast a material "timeshadow" into the future. This group comprised Copplestone's doctor, who was accompanied by his friend, a consulting detective; M. P. Shiel, accompanied by H. G. Wells; Sir William Crookes, accompanied by Nikola Tesla; and Oscar Wilde, who brought along the narrator of the story – a certain Count Lugard, who had recently fled Paris after killing a man in a duel.

Copplestone explained that in the distant future he found human beings reduced to the status of cattle by a race of vampires, which had existed invisibly on the fringes of human society for centuries, until a series of devastating wars had given them the opportunity to emerge from hiding and establish their empire. On

journeying further into the future he had witnessed the consequences of the vampires' eventual mastery of nanotechnology, which allowed their empire to expand throughout the solar system and beyond.

What Copplestone asked of his audience was that they should help him decide whether what he had seen was destined to happen no matter what, or merely a contingent future which might yet be cancelled out by action in the present – but the settlement of this question was put aside when Copplestone suddenly died. The consulting detective was not satisfied that this death was natural, and was convinced that the narrator, Count Lugard, had stolen all that remained of Copplestone's formula – as, indeed, he had – but his final confrontation with Wilde's friend did not work out at all as he anticipated.

Nor was the story ended; indeed, it had only just begun...

There is something magical about artificial light, especially when its effects are combined with those of absinthe. It brings out the true colours which properly define the nature of things. Sometimes the result is unendurable, sometimes redeeming.

The yellow lamplight in my room at the Hôtel d'Alsace had the strangest effect on the wallpaper. Lit by the sun its sprays of foliage and liliaceous blooms were dingy and apologetic, but contrived radiance made their verdance subtly malevolent and caused the flowers to open, shedding intangible but disturbing pollen into the air. Never in the course of my hectic career had I encountered nefarious wallpaper – the cells of Reading Gaol are, of course, sullenly and insultingly naked – and I felt that there was a certain monstrous unfairness in the probability that my final days on Earth were to be spent in such company. As the summer died and autumn damp descended on Paris like a catarrhal contagion the walls of my bedroom became the walls of the world, surfaced with symbols of everything inimical.

I was not well enough to go out, but while I still had strength enough to walk I had to go in search of a kindlier light when darkness fell. Sometimes I had friends to help me, but even Robbie and Reggie had lives of their own to lead and when they were about their own business I had perforce to go alone. Alas, there is nothing like isolation to bring a sick man into brutal confrontation with his own mortality. I was always careful to carry a book with me, but books are imperfect defences, even when read by a redeeming light.

On the night when I met Death my pilgrimage had brought me, slowly and painfully, to the Vieille Rose, a small café on a side-street of the Place de l'Opera. By day, its furnishings were unrepentantly magenta, but when the gas was lit it justified its name. Roses are not always to be preferred to lilies, and there is something essentially effete about pink roses, but there were no *actual* roses to be found in the Vieille Rose; there was instead a general and piquantly elusive atmosphere of rosiness which, in falling upon a whitely powdered cheek or a hollow eye, could produce a naïve impression of health. I had come to that interval between life and death where such illusions are cherished.

When I first noticed that I was being stalked by Death I was interested to observe that he was reluctant to expose himself to the magical light of the Vieille Rose.

A few moments before Death appeared I had caught an accidental glimpse of my reflection in a glass. Usually I am quick to look away when that happens; by day I react to the sight of my features in exactly the same fashion as the greater number of my former acquaintances – except that I must content myself with looking away where they have the oft-exercised option of turning on their heels and vanishing. In this instance, however, the generous gaslight lent my leaden jowls a welcome semblance of healthy flesh. For the briefest instant I could almost have believed that I was myself – but even absinthe has its limitations.

Although the illusion bravely refused to collapse I remained acutely aware of the mottled skin beneath the pale facade, and even more acutely aware of the

fact that the superficial rash was itself a mask for the hidden corruption that was killing me. I could have forgiven the bad mussels which had afflicted my entire skin with crawling spite if only that effect had succeeded in distracting my attention from the patient wrath devouring my heart and soul.

I had just taken a sip of wormwood – a libation to the alien power which possessed me – when I saw Death. Less than half a second passed before he saw me, but the interval was enough to give me the advantage of measuring his response.

Amazingly, Death's instinct was indistinguishable from that of my earthly acquaintances. His cowed head appeared in the doorway of the Vieille Rose; his shadowed eyes scanned the room; his gaze lighted on my face and was immediately arrested – and he abruptly stepped back, out of sight.

"How magnificently discreet!" I thought. "Even Death does not care to be seen with me in public. He has decided to wait for me in the darkened street, to save himself embarrassment."

I did not hasten to meet my destiny. While I finished my glass I studied the other patrons of that strange establishment where Death was reluctant to set foot. The opera had not yet disgorged its crowds upon the street and the whores were bored with waiting. They too had powdered faces, far too many of which masked the same sad corruptions that worked within me.

I tried to count my blessings, but in the circumstances I could think only of liliaceous wreaths. That I had survived Queensberry might be reckoned a blessing, but I had survived Constance too, and Beardsley, and Dowson, not to mention Lewis Carroll. Who could have imagined that I would outlive Beardsley and Dowson? What a wayward course Death followed as he navigated his way through the human shoal!

Although I had lately become expert in the art of procrastination I had never grown fond of its exercise. I was sick enough, and drunk enough, to be confident that I could not long remain awake. The threat of the ominous wallpaper weakened in the face of slumber, and I would have been ashamed to fall asleep in the café like any common-or-garden derelict. In any case, if Death were waiting at the threshold of the Vieille Rose, that was where my particular appointment in Samarra must be.

I picked up my book, surrendered my last few sous as a *pourboire*, and walked unsteadily to the waiting door and the darkness beyond. The book was *La Mer* by Jules Michelet, and I could not help but remember as it nestled warmly in my hand the epitaph which Michelet had wisely laid in store for his own demise: "I have drunk too deep of the black blood of the dead."

What a bold admission! What a beautiful boast!

I, alas, had drunk too much *eau de vie*. Unlike Michelet, who used work as a weapon against his migraines and wrote every sentence as if it might be his last, I had disarmed myself in brilliant conversation and had written every line of verse as if I had eternity at my beck and call. Now, it seemed, I was about to add my own stagnant blood to the waters of the Styx. Death was waiting for me in a damp Paris side-street. Many men would have opined that he had already waited too long.



When I first stepped out on to the rainswept street it seemed that Death had gone, but I was not deceived. As soon as I began to walk in the direction of the Rue des Beaux-Arts I heard his footsteps echoing my own. At the corner I hazarded a surreptitious backward glance and saw him scuttling along from shadow to shadow like some predatory spider. His skull-like head was invisible within its hood but there was no mistaking his improbable thinness. He was not carrying a scythe but he had something clutched in his arms which looked suspiciously like a briefcase.

I was relieved to know that even Death had a sense of place and occasion. In the great gaslit cities of the *fin de siècle* Death has no need for a scythe; he is more aptly equipped with a warrant of arrest – and where should he keep such an instrument, if not in a lawyer's briefcase?

Death did not seem to be in a hurry. He followed me, but he kept his distance. Had it been a year before I might have led him a merry dance from café to café, from the Vieille Rose to the Calisaya and from there to the Chat Gris, but I had lost my ability to climb hills and Montmartre was beyond my powers of attainment.

I looked back for a second time, and caught a glimpse of my pursuer's face as he passed the brashly-lit display-window of a modish boutique. I do not know why I should have been startled, but I was. I had already glimpsed the face, which was so nearly fleshless as to suggest a naked skull, but I could not have guessed that his accusing eyes would shine so diamond bright as they caught the gleam of stray limelight.

"Perhaps it is not Death, after all," I thought hopefully. "Perhaps it is a guest late for a private masque, or perhaps it is that ghost who is rumoured to haunt the Opera, driven from his favoured box by the incompetence of the performers. Is *Faust* playing tonight or *Don Giovanni*?"

When I remembered that the playbills in the Vieille Rose had been advertising *Orpheus in the Underworld* I became afraid to look back again. I had already lost too much that I had loved too well.

I cannot say why I hastened my steps. It is natural to flee from Death and I had always done my best to shun the natural and the expectable. What had I to

fear, after all? What had I to lose but my pain, my ignominy, my incapacity?

I would like to believe that I hurried for the same reason that I continued while it was within my power to traipse from café to café every night, courting the accidental encounters which were far more likely to shame me than bring me relief from loneliness; I would like to think that I had no motive in mind but to continue to be *noticed*, to continue my irritation of the shameful eyes and guilty hearts of those who wanted to forget me. Alas, I fear that there was no such stubborn reason in my flight. The humble truth is I fled because I was afraid – and I was afraid in frank defiance of the obvious facts that I had nothing left of which to be sensibly afraid.

It was all in vain, of course. He caught up with me just as I reached the threshold of my lodgings.

— 2 —

I cast one hopeful glance at the door of the hotel, hoping to see the loyal Dupoirier hurrying down the steps to greet me, but there was no help at hand. I turned to face the creature in the monkish habit, fully prepared to meet those terrible eyes.

"Damn you, Wilde," said Death, with a petulance that seemed wonderfully pathetic. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

Lost in astonishment, I had no reply ready. Devoid of dignity and breath, I could only whisper: "Here, Monsieur, I am known as Sebastian Melmoth!"

He was less astonished than I but he blinked in surprise nevertheless.

"Indeed?" he said, in a voice so hoarse he seemed almost as unfit as I was.

"Well, for that matter I am registered at my own hotel under a false name."

I wondered what *nom de guerre* Death would choose in order to preserve his incognito. I had named myself for Melmoth the Wanderer, but it was difficult to identify a soubriquet that would suit him as well.

Chartley was too recondite and Varney would have been tasteless. In his place, I decided, I would have shunned the frankly melodramatic and opted for

Marius, perhaps even Jude – but I could not say so because I was still trying to recover my breath. I felt so dreadful that I expected him to reach out to claim me at any moment.

"You don't recognize me," he muttered. "Well, I can hardly blame you for that. I have changed a great deal – more than you, I think. We did meet, briefly, in Jan-



'FOOTSTEPS ECHOING MY OWN.'

uary of 1895.” He paused then, to give me space to consider. He wanted me to put a name to him without too much prompting, perhaps in search of reassurance that he was not *entirely* a monster: that the human being was still recognizable within the ravaged mask.

In January 1895 I had had one play in production and another in rehearsal; I had been near the height of my success. I had met a thousand men that month. Alas, the flesh of his face was so shrivelled that he might have been any man in the world, or no man at all. I wanted to see the man in him, but I could not. All I could see was the face of Death.

“It was at Edward Copplestone’s house,” he said, eking out his clues and pleading for my inspiration.

There had been eight of us at Copplestone’s house. Lugard was dead, allegedly a suicide – although the exact circumstances had been, as the saying goes, “hushed up.” Wells was famous now and I had recently heard complimentary rumour of Shiel’s literary endeavours. Nothing like this could have happened to Crookes or Tesla without it being reported as a scandal – which only left the dutiful doctor and his grey-eyed friend. Unless he had grown endways while shrinking sideways this could not possibly be the doctor.

“I had always assumed that your reputation as a master of disguise was overstated,” I said weakly. “I must apologize. Your present performance is truly remarkable.” I had never been less capable of cleverness, but I felt obliged to muster what wit I could.

Always the perfect Victorian, he was not amused. “I wish it were a disguise,” he said. “As things are, I must wear theatrical make-up to go abroad in daylight.” That was a tactless thing to say, as it must have been obvious to him that the same was true of me. He might have lost a substantial fraction of his flesh but he presumably still had his talent for observation. A brief flux of resentful bile put new impetus into my power of speech.

“You need not have been afraid to come into the café and sit down with me,” I told him. “Even the whores would have been resolute in refusing to see us. I knew, of course, that your friend the doctor had brought you back from the dead, but I had not appreciated the price that you had paid for the privilege. I never realized that a sojourn in Tibet could take so much out of a man. No wonder the French prefer Morocco.”

It came home to me then that I was not about to die. I would live to fight another day, still capable of striking out with my most lethal weapon. I would not long survive the 19th century, but I might yet see the *siècle* to its appointed *fin*.

“I come as a friend,” he said, in a wounded tone. “I have a tale to tell and a letter to deliver – but first...”

He unbuckled the straps of his case and threw back the flap. It was full of papers collected into several distinct bundles, each one tied with green ribbon. He took out the thickest and held it towards me. As he did so the loose sleeve of his black robe slid back a way, exposing the skeletal wrist and forearm. There was so little flesh on them that every bone and sinew was clearly outlined, but his muscles were not without strength and resolution. His hand was steadier than mine as I took the package from him, moving *La Mer* from right hand to left in order to do so.

“I don’t need your testimony,” he said gruffly, implying by his reluctance that he did. “I need your understanding. Read it, I beg of you. There is more to come. I suppose there is no chance that you could pack your bags and meet me at the Gare du Nord tomorrow?”

If he imagines that I could return to England, I thought, he must really have been in Tibet. “Quite impossible,” I croaked. “I am bound to Paris by fate and mortality alike.”

Now that he had had time to study me he knew exactly what I meant.

“Of course,” he said. “It might be wisest, in any case, to improvise an audience here, as soon as humanly possible. My biographer’s literary agent has given me a letter of introduction to a man reputed to be one of the cleverest in France, and the doctor has a colleague here who numbers another among his patients. I will make what arrangement I can, with all possible haste, and send a messenger. I’m truly sorry to find you in this condition...”



He broke off when the door behind me opened. It was only my guardian angel, Monsieur Dupoirier, anxious for my safety – but Death’s double did not know him, and his instinct was to retreat from curious and censorious eyes. He stepped back immediately, shrugging his shoulders so that the cowl of his habit slid forwards, hiding his awful face.

As Dupoirier came closer Death moved away, anxious to fade into the darkest shadow he could find and make good his retreat. He was no predatory spider now, but something far more circumspect; even so, I wondered what kind of subtle web I might be holding in my hands.

“Who was that?” Dupoirier demanded. Like Moréas and Tailhède he always spoke to me in English, not because he intended any insult to my French but because he thought the English language an instrument which none could play more delicately than I, and felt a duty to encourage my use of it.

“It was a living legend,” I told him, my voice diminishing again to a mere whisper. “Do not be deceived by his resemblance to the Opera Ghost. He is said to be the greatest detective in the world. He has asked for my help in solving a particularly difficult case – but I must ask you to be discreet.”

Dupoirier took my intended inference, although he could not help curling his lip in slight contempt. Where great detectives were concerned, the French remained fiercely loyal to their very own Inspecteur Lecocq and to the gladly-adopted C. Auguste Dupin; they were unimpressed by English Johnny-come-latelies.

“No one will hear of his presence from me, Monsieur Melmoth,” Dupoirier assured me, with a solemnity which could only signify that he thought I needed to be humoured.

The exertion of my flight had reduced me to an unsteady wreck, hardly able to stand without assistance. Dupoirier had to take me by the arm and lead me into his precious haven. He helped me up the stairs and along the corridor, using his pass key to open my room to save me the ignominy of groping in my pockets.

I think Dupoirier was a better man than any I had known. If only he had not chosen to decorate his hotel

with such appalling wallpaper! I thanked him very kindly when he had completed his work by helping me into bed and pouring a little laudanum into a glass.

"Leave the lamp, if you will," I said, as he reached out to stifle it. "I should like to read for a while."

Dupoirier glanced at the copy of *La Mer* which I had laid down on top of the manuscript on the bedside table. He nodded his head sagely, as if to judge that I could be trusted to the company of an earnest man who had drunk too deep of the black blood of the dead. Then he withdrew.

I pushed *La Mer* aside and took up the manuscript, riffling through its pages. It was written in a strangely punctilious hand which did not seem to me to have been learned from any tutor in England or France. The first page was blank, serving as a protector for the rest. When I had untied the ribbon and set the blank page aside I found that there was a title and a signature on the second leaf. The title was *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires*; the signature was *Lucian, Count Lugard*.

I had thought of Lugard and the curious persecution to which he was subject when I had read Bram Stoker's *Dracula* not long after the commencement of my exile, but only cursorily; I knew that he was safe from any further slurs upon his name. I wondered how and when the great detective could have come into possession of such a document as this.

I began to read, and immediately found myself present on the page. Curiosity was mingled with, and then displaced by, nostalgia. I had been at the height of my powers in those days. How beautiful the world had been! How could so much have changed in the space of five years?

When I read further, however, curiosity returned in fuller force – and by the time the lamplight began to flicker and fade I was well and truly spellbound.

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spent the greater part of the next day in fidgety anticipation. My usual ration of morphine could not settle me. I was tempted to take a draught of laudanum or chloral but I did not dare; I felt that I had to preserve my clarity of mind no matter what the cost might be. I knew that this would probably be my last significant excursion, save only for the longest journey of all – and I had no expectation that the latter would bring me to any destination worth attaining.

While I waited I had little alternative but to reappraise the stories recorded in the manuscript: not just Copplestone's story but Lugard's too.

When I had first heard them, I admit, I had not given overmuch thought to the significance of Copplestone's three visions. I had found them thoroughly entertaining and admirably adventurous but my life had been so full that they were bound to seem peripheral, trivial distractions from the intoxicating riot of my burgeoning fame. Only now, with the cup of my life drained to the unpalatable dregs, was it possible for me to bring that tale into the full illumination of my garish consciousness. Only now was it possible for me to ask, in earnest: *what if it were true?*

If it were *literally* true, then the future did not belong to the human race but to a race of shapeshifters which had hidden in our midst since time immemorial, dining

on our blood when the necessity and the opportunity arose in resonance. If it were literally true, the vampires dimly glimpsed and furtively embroidered by legend were the blessed, if not the meek, who would inherit the earth and remake it as Heaven. And why not? Even Stoker, writing under the influence of Arminius Vambery, had not succeeded in making Count Dracula seem more menacing or morally defective than the late and unlamentable Marquess of Queensberry.

I knew, however, that the likelier alternative was that it was not literally true at all. In all probability, the truth contained within the three visions was the glimpse they offered of Copplestone's inner being. It is, of course, our *inner* beings which are our true beings. In public we all wear masks: masks which, if they are successful, reflect the expectations which others have of us, only slightly leavened by our own desperate individuality. No man is his true self when he speaks to another or acts under observation (and everything he writes down constitutes acting under observation). Only in his dreams is a man exposed for what he truly is – and it is only those dreams which he utterly fails to understand which he can relate to others without rigorous self-censorship. The question which really faced me, as I reconsidered Copplestone's story, was: *what does it reveal of Copplestone's true self?*

Copplestone's vision testified readily enough to the obvious: that he was a man nearing the end of his natural lifespan, afraid of death and of darkness (if the two can be distinguished in the language of dreams). It reflected, inevitably, his life's work and his life's fascination. What could be more natural than that a pioneer of anthropology should dream of an unknown tribe living both remotely and close at hand? What could be more apt than the conviction that their secret rites, although repulsive to initial contemplation, should hold a promise of perfection and achievement long denied to their prodigal brothers, whose civilization had become decadent and corrupt?

What was authentically intriguing about Copplestone's nightmares, I decided, was not their obsession with vampires but their naked Utopianism: their determined progress, in three stages, from the ridiculous to the sublime. I had never encountered a dream which attained such a marvellous and magnificent climax. The fact that it denied death was trivial; it was the *manner* in which it defied death that was vital. Any man might dream of an effete Christian Heaven or an eternity of gloomy vampiric undeath, but Copplestone had dreamed of something far richer and far more dramatic than either.

If the manuscript could be trusted, Lugard had realized all of that at the time. Lugard had been the only one of us who had perceived the real meaning of Copplestone's narrative. If Lugard's story were *literally* true – and I had reason to think that it might be – then Copplestone's narrative had spoken to his inner being with all the force of revelation. He had seen, far better even than Copplestone, that the hunger which men suffer and the ecstasy which men crave are contemptibly tentative – and that the only state worth striving for once a man has exhausted that which mundane existence has to offer is the hunger and ecstasy of vampires. Except, of course, that one has to add the

rider that the vampires in question must be Copplestone's vampires: vampires which can learn, having been given the opportunity by courtesy of their exceptional longevity and ingenuity, to live in the light and share in its magic.

I understood, now, what Lugard had read between the lines of Copplestone's story. I read between the lines of his in exactly the same way. I could not quite believe, however, that the man who looked like Death had read the same, even with the aid of his dehumanizing condition. If he too had dreamed a dream like Copplestone's, which had exposed his inner being as comprehensively, it must have displayed a very different truth. He was, after all, a very different man.



The lamps had been lit by the time the summons eventually came. The baleful wallpaper was all a-glitter with tiny crystals produced by the decay of its arsenous dyes. I had heard it said that Napoleon had been murdered by his wallpaper while in exile on St Helena and I wondered whether mine could possibly have been cut from the same misanthropic roll.

When Dupoirier arrived with the card which the messenger had brought I seized it eagerly, immediately furrowing my brow as I read the address in the Rue des Saints-Pères. I had never been to the house but all Paris knew the name of one man who lived there. Before his disappearance Death's double had been babbling about his ready access to two of the cleverest men in France, and it appeared that he knew whereof he spoke. It was Rémy de Gourmont's apartment to which I was being summoned.

I had not seen Gourmont for several years. I had heard that he never left his apartments nowadays, thus precluding any possibility of our bumping into one another. Although I was not ashamed to take all possible measures to engineer chance encounters in the cafés and on the boulevards I had made it my practice never to call on anyone at home. I felt sure that old friends like Marcel Schwob and Pierre Louÿs would not have turned me away, and I dare say that Gourmont would have welcomed me as gladly as either of them, but I did not feel that I had the right to initiate such contacts, which would be sure to attract attention and perhaps adverse publicity.

I had not fully understood in 1895 what difficulties Count Lugard had endured when he became the target of malicious gossip, but I certainly understood it now. When a man like Jean Moréas visited me it was an act of kindness, but were I to visit him it could only be construed as an imposition.

"Tucker mentioned that Gourmont's doctor entertained a guest from England a little while ago," Dupoirier told me, evidently having read the card and recognized the address. "A man better known for his endeavours in publicizing the glorious career of his close friend, a consulting detective. It is said that his reports are true, although he invariably changes all the names to protect the innocent."

"It is the guilty who have most need of the protection of anonymity," I murmured. "Could you possibly advance me the fare for a cab to the Rue des Saints-

Pères?"

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Dupoirier obliged me in the matter of my cab-fare, but the journey was not without penalty; Gourmont's apartment was on the fourth floor. By the time I had made my ascent I hardly had strength enough to pull the copper chain which served as the great man's bell-rope. I felt exceedingly itchy, horribly weary and almost desolate of wit.

I was admitted to Gourmont's rooms by a thin and dishevelled young man dressed in bicycle shorts. I might have been surprised by this remarkable apparition had I not possessed such an insatiable appetite for gossip, but I already knew him by reputation. He could only be the man who had scandalized Paris by appearing at Stéphane Mallarmé's funeral in what might well have been these very same bicycle shorts and a pair of yellow shoes borrowed from the incomparable Rachilde.

"Monsieur Jarry, I presume," I said, bowing my head politely.

"Maître Melmoth!" he countered, with a brilliant smile that united amusement and pleasure. He might have said more but he hesitated over the choice of language and was lost, even before his expression was clouded by dismay. "Vous êtes malade!" he exclaimed.

"Une maladie cutanée," I murmured, in the hope of excusing the most glaring of my symptoms.

The young man led me through the book-lined passage to the sitting room and ushered me to an armchair similar to the one in which Death's double was already reclining.

The shrivelled detective was still clad in his hooded cloak but he had lowered the hood to his shoulders, leaving his eerily fleshless head fully exposed. Save for a few wisps of snow-white hair his pate was utterly bald, and if he had any colour left in his cheeks the dim light of Gourmont's lamps was insufficient to display it. What a pair we must have seemed to the puzzled trio who had been summoned with unseemly alacrity to the *séance*!

Rémy de Gourmont was dressed in a brown monk's robe which matched the detective's black one, but he also wore a small grey felt cap. He sat in an armchair behind a sloping desk. The lamp beside him was shielded in such a way as to shadow his bearded face. Tubercular lupus had so disfigured him that he now found himself unwelcome in cafés which once had been proud to attract his patronage. He had become a recluse.

Gourmont leaned forward in order to greet me with a slight bow, but he moved back into the shadow immediately afterwards. "Thank you for coming, Monsieur Melmoth," he said, in perfect English. "Jarry will have introduced himself, no doubt, and you already know Monsieur Sherrinford. May I present Professor Flammarion, whose work you will certainly know."

This was a man much older than Gourmont or Jarry, and very different in kind. I had, indeed, read more than a little of the astronomer's extraordinary work, but we had never met; he and I had moved in different circles. He greeted me politely enough, considering that he must have heard at least as much of me as I had of him. The stubborn normality of his appearance served to confirm and emphasize the bizarrerie of the whole

quintet. I acknowledged his greeting before turning to the man I had mistaken for Death – who had not, after all, chosen Marius or Jude for his *nom de guerre*.

“Sherrinford,” I murmured. “There is a village of that name in Yorkshire, is there not? Between Mycroft and Cockayne, if I am not mistaken – or is that Stableford?” The armchair was comfortable, and I felt that within its kindly embrace I might be able to shrug off the effects of my climb.

The detective blinked. Apparently he was not in a mood to chat about matters geographical. He leaned forward in his chair, utterly unafraid of the light which threw his wasted features into sharp relief, and said: “Have you read the manuscript, Mr Wilde?”

“Every word,” I assured him. “I found it quite compelling, in spite of the fact that the greater part of it was perfectly familiar to me.” I did not bother to object to his use of my real name, given that it was liberally scattered through the pages of the manuscript – unlike his own, which Lugard had disdained to mention overmuch.

“I have summarized its contents for these gentlemen,” the cadaverous detective said, “but I thought it best to let you see the original.”

“But I am puzzled,” I confessed. “I cannot see how Lugard found the time to write it all down between the end of his conversation with you and his unfortunate demise.” I knew that he had some astonishing revelation up his capacious sleeve. *I do not need your testimony*, he had said, hypocritically. *I need your understanding*. I felt that I was one step ahead of him. If this assembly was an echo of the one at Copplestone’s house five years before, he must have a tale of his own to tell – of an adventure which had turned him into Death’s double.

“He did not write it down before he died,” the pseudonymous Sherrinford reported, gravely. “If he is indeed its author, and the other documents in my case are equally accurate, then he will not write it down for 30,000 years – perhaps more.”

“If he is its author?” I echoed, politely.

“It was my hand that wrote it down, not six months ago,” Sherrinford confessed. “The handwriting is not my normal script, but my fingers held the pen. I had had a dream – a very remarkable dream.”

“Had you, indeed?” I murmured

“Mr Wilde,” he said – and I knew now that he was using my real name in order to emphasize my entitlement to pass judgment – “will you tell me whether the private conversations which took place between yourself and Count Lugard are accurately recorded in that manuscript?”

“To the best of my recollection,” I said, “they are perfectly accurate.”

He did not seem unduly relieved to hear me say so. He had taken their truth for granted. “In that case,” he said sonorously, “there is an authentic mystery here. The visions which I experienced under the influence of Copplestone’s drug have a measure of truth in them. I do not say that this is proof that they are true in their entirety; Copplestone did not ask us to believe that of his own visions, and I am as acutely aware as he was of the danger that my experience might have been polluted by anxious confabulation. It is certain, however, that there was an uncanny aspect to my adventure.”

He looked at each of the three Frenchmen, clearly expecting some formal endorsement of this conclusion.



It was the astronomer who appointed himself spokesman. “We all owe you an apology, Mr Wilde,” he said, speaking in English – presumably for the benefit of the detective – “for dragging you from your lodgings when you are plainly unwell, but it seems that you have been party to this astonishing affair since the beginning and are able to confirm at least part of the story to which we have been listening. Ordinarily, I would not dream of demanding confirmation of anything stated by a man of such outstanding reputation as Monsieur ... Sherrinford, but he has insisted on making provision for it. I am not a man to balk at the unusual, as you may know, but I readily admit that this is far beyond anything I could ever have imagined” – from the author of *Lumen* and the text whose title was the symbol Ū this was a significant admission – “and I am sure that Monsieur de Gourmont and Monsieur Jarry are just as anxious as I am to hear what you have to say about it.”

I wondered how much of what was written in the manuscript had been contained in the great detective’s oral narration. “The conclusion of the story,” I said slowly, “is more bizarre than anything I could have imagined. Tell me, Sherrinford, did you really return to Count Lugard’s house at dawn, believing that he was the vampiric reincarnation of Vlad Dragul the Impaler, armed with a sharpened stake to hammer through his heart?”

The pseudonymous detective did not seem unduly discomfited by this question; apparently, he had told the three Frenchmen *everything*. “I returned to Lugard’s house as soon as I realized that I had been the victim of hypnotic suggestion,” he answered, flatly. “I found the count and the girl dead. He had dosed her with strychnine, then swallowed an abundant measure himself. He did not trust his mesmeric power, it seems – or perhaps he simply thought it wisest to play safe.”

“That, in itself, could not have convinced you to take his tale seriously,” I was quick to point out, thus proving that I too was a master of deductive reasoning (and I had noticed, too, that the detective had not actually denied that he had had a sharpened stake with him). “You would have thought him mad were there not some material proof to support the claim that death would not be the end of him. How much weight had he lost, do you suppose? As much as you have?”

“Not quite as much as that,” the detective conceded. “More, I judged, than Copplestone’s corpse. The Count was well-fed, but I knew as soon as I saw his exquisitely-tailored suit collapsed upon his bones that he was at least four stones lighter than he had been three hours before.”

“The woman too?” I asked.

The detective shook his horrid head. “I had never seen her alive,” he declared, “but the testimony of her costume was that her slenderness was entirely natural. Perhaps she had insufficient mass to spare, or perhaps the kind of escape that Lugard was attempting to contrive requires the active power of the will.”

Perhaps I should not have been saddened to hear

that, but I was. Even Heaven cannot be perfect if one enters it without one's chosen company; bliss may be bliss but failure is failure. Not, of course, that there was any reliable reason to believe that Lugard had actually *gone* anywhere, or that he had found any kind of Heaven if he had. Lugard must have written or dictated a record of our conversations while he was alive, but he could have done so in London in January of 1895. My supportive testimony could prove no more than that – but I was enthusiastic to hear his story nevertheless.

"How did you recover Copplestone's formula, given that Lugard had gone to such pains to destroy it?" I asked him.

"My friend was Copplestone's personal physician," he replied. "He had access to all his notes and journals. I had collected the bottles which Lugard had purchased and the dregs left behind in the flask he had drained. I have, as you may know, a certain expertise in analytical chemistry. The work of reconstruction was laborious and time-consuming, but it was not so very difficult."

"So poor Lugard failed twice over," I murmured. "He failed to reproduce his lovely ghost and he failed to prevent his fellow men from holding on to the supposed secret of time travel."

"May I tell you what resulted when I tried the formula myself?" Death's double asked.

All I could say in reply was: "Please do."

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"When I first heard Copplestone's story," the great detective said, "I agreed with the judgment of the majority – a majority which included Mr Wilde – that what he had experienced was merely a kind of dream, not an actual vision of the shape of things to come. I did not modify that judgment when I discovered Lugard dead, having lost weight in the same mysterious fashion as Copplestone, but I *was* forced to the conclusion that the mystery was deeper than it had appeared. If Copplestone's dramatic weight loss after death had been a symptom of his poisoning then it was only to be expected that Lugard would exhibit a similar weight loss – but what, in that case, of the woman's apparent retention of her normal weight? Why did she display no such symptom?"

"Simple curiosity impelled me to reproduce Copplestone's formula. Experiments with rats testified to the extent of its toxicity but did not produce any weight-loss. Nor could my friend the doctor identify any physiological mechanism that might have caused such a reduction, although he reminded me that the science of life is in its infancy and that even the most elementary workings of the human body have yet to be satisfactorily explained. He advised me to forget the matter, and from time to time, while my attention was absorbed by other problems, I contrived to do so – but mine is the unsettled kind of mind which restlessly demands occupation. Whenever I was not engaged with some other conundrum the mystery of Copplestone's drug and Lugard's fate would return to haunt me."

He sounded apologetic and defensive, but I understood what he was saying very well. The flippancy with which I had once observed that I could resist anything but temptation concealed a deeper truth, whose awful

magnitude had been amply revealed by my trials and my imprisonments. The souls of certain men are so configured that they cannot turn away from a beckoning hand, even though they know full well that it is an invitation to disaster. Such obsessions are akin to the kind of mesmeric captivity to which men like Lugard claim to be able to subject their fellows; that enigmatic power resides in objects and fictions as well as people.

"You might well agree with my friend the doctor that my increasing determination to try Copplestone's drug for myself was a kind of madness," Death's double continued, "but I knew that Copplestone had survived two doses easily enough, and might have survived the third had he been as fit and sturdy as I then was. I knew, too, that the science of man was indeed in its infancy, and that no man could know what it might yet produce. Progress depends on the willingness of men to take chances, to go against the grain of caution and resist the deadening hand of normality. My hunger for enlightenment drew me inexorably to the moment when I prepared a dose of the drug for my own use."

"Once he saw that my resolution was absolute it was not difficult to persuade the doctor to stay with me while the experiment ran its course, just as he had earlier stayed with Copplestone. The doctor administered the injection himself."

"Like Copplestone, I first experienced a period of vertiginous delirium in which multitudinous images of sight and sound pressed incoherently upon my brain. I felt that I was falling from a great height, floating on the very brink of consciousness, but I did not feel unduly uncomfortable until the hectic cataract of light faded to grey, and then to black. I had no sense of *awakening* into a restabilized world, but as soon as stability was restored to me it was disturbed in a very different way."

"I had but a moment to realize that I was still lying flat on my back, staring up at the night sky instead of the ceiling of my apartment, when I was seized by the most awful distress imaginable."

"Copplestone had told his audience that a time-shadow has less capacity for feeling than an ordinary body – that it is less susceptible to changes in temperature and sensations of touch. During his visions his dream-self took no nourishment, but the implication was that his phantom had to continue some kind of physiological activity in order to allow him to see and think – and must therefore have continued to breathe."

"I certainly attempted to draw breath as soon as I was becalmed – but what *my* dream-self breathed in was not the life-giving air to which I have become accustomed. What I drew into my ghostly lungs was extremely cold, and utterly noxious."

"I cannot describe the agony which seized me when I drew that first breath, nor the horror which assaulted my consciousness as I realized what was happening to me. I suppose I could speak in metaphor, of daggers of ice striking at the centre of my being or loathsome demons unfurling their hideous wings within the envelope of my flesh, but I pride myself on being a rational man, scrupulously exact in my accounts. The simple fact is that the English language has no words to specify such an experience. I was convinced that I was dying – but the pain was so great that my only wish was that death would come quickly."

"Death did not come. After a few horridly-extended seconds the unbearable pain began to ease. It was not eased quickly, and I would have given anything to accelerate the process of its lessening, but it did fade. The fading eventually produced a kind of numbness which was not entirely comfortable but was nevertheless easily bearable. I remained acutely conscious of the shape and movement of my phantom lungs as they tried in vain to find sustenance, and it was a distinctly ugly sensation, but the pain had been leached out of it, as if by a powerful anaesthetic.

"I became conscious of the shape of my supine body too, especially those parts of it which were in contact with the ground on which I lay. For a few moments, I wondered whether I might be sinking slowly into a viscous liquid or quicksand – but then the speculative perception reversed itself, and I wondered whether some strange legion of tiny animalcules might be rising up from the surface, passing into my flesh by means of some exotic osmosis.

"I know now that the latter was more nearly the case, although I admit the possibility that I have reconstructed my memory in the light of that knowledge. I was, indeed, possessed by a legion of tiny animalcules, just as Copplestone had been when he ventured into the future for the third time. I call them animalcules because the dictionary offers me no better alternative, but they were not products of natural evolution.

"I had reflexively closed my eyes at the first shock of the pain, but as the pain eased I forced them open again. I was determined to see what there was to be seen.

"I knew that I could not raise myself up – at least, not immediately. Copplestone had reported that his timeshadow felt unnaturally heavy, and that he required practice before he could master such elementary operations as walking and talking, but I was in a worse state by far. I could not twitch a finger or a toe, but I knew that I must nevertheless do my best to come to terms with my new condition. Even if I were to remain anchored to the ground throughout my sojourn in the future, I must make what observations I could. What, otherwise, would be the point of the experiment?

"Having no alternative, I studied the stars in the sky, searching for any sign of difference from the constellations with which I was familiar. I was unable to ascertain whether there had been any slight alteration in the configuration of Orion's belt or Charles's Wain but I took some comfort from the fact that I could put names to those two formations.

"Because the night was moonless my immediate environs were very dark. I could see little to either side of me that had any recognizable shape, although the terrain was not perfectly even. The faint starlight was reflected by numerous surfaces which must have been white and slightly sparkling, but without being able to turn my head I could not be sure whether they were formations of ice or the caps of gigantic mushrooms. The soundlessness of the night was so utter as to be ominous.

"The coldness within me had lingered longer than the pain, but now that too began to ebb away. I could no longer feel the shape of my ghostly lungs or the soggy contact which my ectoplasmic flesh made with the ground on which I lay. Indeed, I began to feel almost well, securely insulated from the insults and

injuries which the world was avid to inflict upon me. It was a kind of relief I had experienced before, after injecting myself with cocaine.

"Now I found that I *could* move my hands and my feet, although the movements were unreasonably sluggish. I contrived to roll on to my side, and then into a prone position, from which I began to lever myself up on to my knees. The strain on my arms renewed my appalling discomfort but I gritted my teeth and persisted in my efforts. When I had achieved the kneeling position I had to pause, with my eyes tightly shut, to fight a tide of nausea which surged through me. I knew that I had to defeat it and force my eyes open again; I could not simply lie there, waiting to be dragged back to the safety of my body and my bed.

"When I had mustered the strength necessary to bring my clumsy dream-self to its feet I found that there was still disappointingly little to be seen at the surface of the world: no earthbound light-source was visible between the horizons, although there were multitudinous tiny sparks glinting from what I now deduced to be sloping faces of ice and rivulets of fallen snow. In order to have any intelligence of where I was I had to squat down again and run my ghostly fingers over the place where I had come to rest.

"My phantom fingers were still benumbed, only crudely sensitive to texture and temperature, but I was able to feel a coarse, dry sand, some of whose particles were bound into larger grains. It was as if I were on a beach ... or in the depths of an Arctic desert. The desert seemed more likely when I studied the horizon cut out by the patterns of starlight; there were no mountain peaks but it was by no means featureless. It was as if I were in the centre of a vast broken plain.

"I knew that Copplestone had found not the slightest trace of London in his own visions, but at least he had found a luxuriant forest growing in its place. What disaster, I wondered, could have turned the miraculously lush world described in his final adventure into this seemingly-barren desolation? Or was mine a different dream entirely?

"I tried to call out but I miscalculated the effort required to activate my vocal cords. Even at the second attempt I contrived no more than an ululating wail. Copplestone had told us that countless machines the size of a bee had been set to watch for his second return, and that they had found him almost immediately, but I had no reason to expect that any such watchers awaited me. I felt sure that I had been invaded – and perhaps saved from ignominious extinction – by much tinier things, but I dared not take the inference that anything of a more familiar magnitude might come to my aid. I was still possessed by the anxiety that all life on this dream-Earth might be extinct; it was for that reason that I was filled with relief and not with fear when I saw shapes moving against the background of stars. As the shapes approached, however, and I realized how large they were, the relief was moderated by anxious curiosity.

"They seemed more like bats than birds, their huge wings being more precisely-shaped. When they came closer I saw glints of starlight reflected from their bodies, which gave the impression that their unfeathery hides were adorned with gems or crystals. There were

five of them, flying in a diamond formation, and when they came directly overhead the pattern of their movement changed. The four marking the corners of the diamond circled like a great wheel while the shadow at its hub increased. The creature which descended upon me revealed its true size for the first time as it came closer and closer; it was even bigger than I had thought. I did not know whether I was to be prey for some incredible man-eating monster – and I was by no means reassured when I was abruptly gripped by two sets of claws and plucked into the air.

“The talons sank into my strange flesh, penetrating its surface. I almost expected to feel them meet within me, having punctured my shoulder-blades. They did not, but that did not lessen the sense of invasion, the horrible awareness of their points buried deep within my softer tissues. I dared not struggle, but I was terrified nevertheless. Perhaps it was terror alone which made me lose consciousness again, or perhaps it was the thinning of the already-inadequate air as we rose to dizzying heights. I only know that it added insult to injury that I, who had set forth as a bold explorer ready for any marvel or frank impossibility, should be delivered to darkness without and darkness within, precluding all possibility of efficient discovery.”

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“I have no idea how long my unconsciousness lasted,” the man who called himself Sherrinford continued, “but when I woke again I was still in the penetrating grip of the mysterious monster, which was still flying high above the dark and featureless earth. One thing, however, had changed.

“To my left, in what I promptly identified as the east, the horizon now cut through the centre of a near-circular body which was far too wan to be the rising sun. Its size identified it, beyond the shadow of a doubt, as the almost-full moon, but without that crucial indicator I would have refused to accept the conclusion. Not a single recognizable feature remained of the cratered face that I knew – not even its characteristic pallor. It was patterned in purples and greens, which gleamed as if they were painted on the lacquered lid of a casket. Superimposed upon this background were dozens of tiny circular formations like vivid gems. Although I say that they were *tiny* I know that they must really have been huge, else they could not have been visible at a distance of a quarter of a million miles.

“There had been no earthly clouds obscuring the stars at the time I was lifted from the ground, but there was cloud a-plenty now, massing in what I now took to be the south. The creature which carried me was heading directly towards the cloud-mass, and hence towards a darkness even more profound than that which I had previously encountered. In the meantime, though, I had an opportunity to look down at the part of the Earth’s surface which the rising moon was gradually illuminating. I saw that the world into which my dream had delivered me was, as I had feared, a vast wilderness of ice and snow, interrupted by dark ravines. I could see no sign of life at all, nor any edifice that might have been the work of human hands.

“If this is England, I thought, it must have fallen prey to some unimaginable catastrophe.”

“I knew, though, that if this vision were connected with the ones Copplestone had experienced then England had ceased to exist a long time ago, obliterated as a political entity by the world wars that had sealed mankind’s fate. By the time the ice had come to claim it, this must have been something other than England: something not merely foreign but alien.”

The good Victorian seemed to find that thought uniquely horrible – as if England were indeed another Eden and demi-paradise, full-armoured against infection and the hand of war. None in his audience could possibly have agreed with him, I least of all. To me, England had been a land which contained a few dear souls, but never a dear land in its own right, never a precious stone. And had the stone set in the silver sea not been part of the Empire of the Ice in the long-distant past, before England was e’er dreamt on? In the sweep of this kind of vision, England – no more and no less than Ireland – had been only a flutter of the butterfly wing of fate, a formless phantom glimpsed for an instant in the corner of the eye of time.

“So fast was my carrier’s flight,” the eminent Victorian went on, “that the clouds rushed upon me within a matter of minutes. The great flapping wings became invisible against their impenetrable background. I could not be entirely sorry that the disturbing moon had been obscured, but the darkness was unwelcome. I tried to open my mouth as if to protest, but found my lips knitted shut. I tried to raise my hand as if to investigate the obstruction, but found my arm equally immovable.

“I knew then that my attenuated body really had been invaded while I lay upon the ground, and that the invaders were still in the process of completing their dominion over the empire of my flesh. In a different world, similar invaders had done Copplestone no harm, but this was my nightmare and not his. I knew that I had no guarantee of survival.

“Even as my fear grew, though, something inside me responded to its pressure. This time, it was neither panic nor lack of oxygen which caused me to black out. This time, it was as if a key had been turned inside my head to block the flow of my thoughts.”



Death’s double paused, raised his terrible head a little higher, and looked about him as if to judge the reaction of his audience. Gourmont was invisible behind his screen of light but Jarry met his gaze with a smile, albeit one that was slightly impatient. Flammarion, however, had become noticeably more interested; his attention had now been caught. Unlike young Wells at Copplestone’s house he did not seem to have jumped to the conclusion that he was being plagiarized, but he had discovered an echo of his own accounts of visionary odysseys in time and space undertaken by disembodied spirits.

“My next awakening was more comfortable by far than the earlier ones,” the story-teller went on. “It was a measured rise from dreamless sleep, and as soon as I drew breath I felt wonderfully well. It was as if the air had been renewed and improved, filled with life-giving oxygen and further sweetened. I opened my eyes to pearly light, and was profoundly relieved by its quality. When I found that I was able to sit up and move my

limbs freely I was exultant – but my excitement was moderated when my eyes adapted to the glow and I discovered where I was.

“The gentle light was artificial, although it was emitted neither by a gas-lamp nor by an electric bulb. It was emanating from the entire inner surface of a sphere in which I was enclosed, like a vast soap bubble or a sealed aquarium. Within the sphere there was a flat blue pallet, upholstered with a curiously slick and spongy substance, on which I had been laid. There was no other furniture. I think my dream-self had been clothed when I first materialized, as Copplestone’s had been, but I was naked now.

“I called out: ‘Where am I? Who brought me here?’ The answer was immediate. The light shining from the confining bubble was stirred in a peculiar fashion and the image of a human face was formed, looking down at me. It was considerably distorted by the concavity of the surface and seemed very large, but it was nevertheless recognizable as the face of Edward Copplestone. I was not, however, deluded into thinking that it was anything more than an image.

“Don’t be afraid,’ said a strangely-accented voice. The lips of the image moved but the voice was quite different from any human voice I had ever heard. ‘You are safe now – but we have not much time left. You must listen carefully. This is a matter of the utmost importance.’

“Who are you?’ I demanded. ‘Why have you placed me in this prison? Why do you confront me with an image of a human face? Why will you not show me your true appearance?’

“We are machines,’ the voice replied. ‘You have been placed in confinement so that you might be supplied with good air. The Earth’s air is no longer breathable even by entities like yourself. Even as a timeshadow you would have died had the nanozoons not preserved you. They have been lying dormant in the snow for millennia, waiting for the advent of some such being as yourself. This image of a human face is being projected in the hope of reassuring you that we mean you no harm; we have no faces of our own with which to confront you but we are friends of humankind. We have been waiting for a long time, not knowing that anyone would ever come. We have sent word of your coming to those who appointed us to watch and wait, but time is short and it is almost certain that our signal has been intercepted and overheard by those who might try to interfere. Please listen carefully to what we have to

say; the future of mankind depends upon it.’

“I was, of course, prepared for the possibility that if my vision were to take up its narrative thread where Copplestone’s had left off I might be found by machines which could speak and were prepared to take a keen interest in my fate, just as Copplestone had been in his second and third expeditions. In the written account of his third vision the benevolent machines which took possession of him had showed him a miracle-laden world of limitless opportunity but the very fact that he had been shown these wonders by means of some kind of futuristic kinematograph, while his timeshadow

remained in the same place, left open the possibility that it was all a lie, a calculated deception.

“I recalled that in his second vision Copplestone had been *interrogated* by the machines which had lain in wait for him and delivered him to the custody of the vampires who ruled the world, and he had taken care not to tell them what they wanted to know.

Even in a dream I was fully prepared to be as cautious as he. I had the profoundest doubts as to what might be lurking beyond the bubble that confined me, and I had taken careful note of the voice’s reference to *those who might try to interfere*. One giant bat had been enough to carry me here, but it had travelled under escort.

“I am listening,’ I assured the voice.

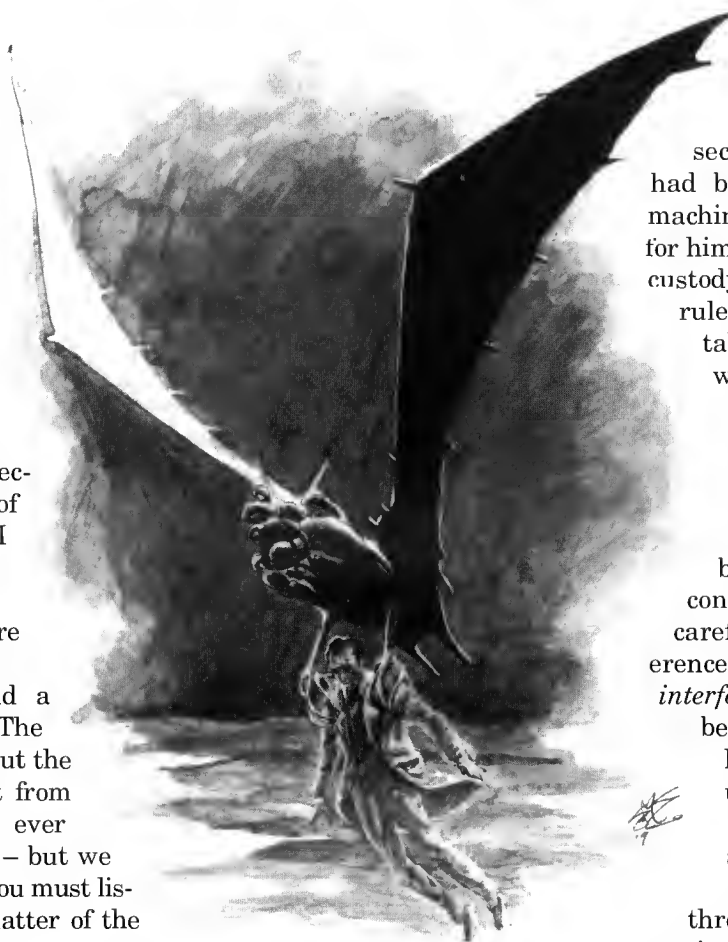
“You will slip back through time very soon,’ the voice informed me, ‘but you must return. We will tell you how the drug may be further refined,

how your body may be protected from its ill-effects, and what dose to use to bring you to a future a little way ahead of this one. Copplestone will then explain everything. The Earth is dead now, but it might yet live again. The human race is extinct, but might yet have a role to play in the destiny of the universe. When you return, you shall be heir to such wonders as you never dreamed possible, and such rewards as you never dared hope for.’

“What calamity has befallen the Earth?’ I asked. ‘How was its life destroyed, its air rendered unbreathable?’

“All will be explained in time,’ the voice promised. ‘Forgive us our haste, but you must commit the formula to memory. If time remains, we will answer your questions, but first we must ensure that you will be able to return.’

“The voice proceeded to give me instructions for the concoction of a better variant of Copplestone’s time-displacement drug, followed by very precise instructions



‘SOMETHING OTHER THAN ENGLAND.’

regarding dosage. Then it gave me another set of instructions, for the preparation of medicinal compounds which would keep my body safe while my consciousness was projected even further into time.

"I had a thousand questions, and did not know which were most likely to be met with useful answers. At a hazard, I asked where Copplestone was, and why he had not waited in the vicinity if he were so very ardent to discover other travellers in time.

"Professor Copplestone is on the moon,' the voice informed me. 'He could not wait here, not knowing whether he would have to wait 10,000 or a 100,000 years – but he will come, now that he has reason to hope that you will return, and some confidence that the date of your return can be estimated to within a few hundred years.'

"There was only one question I could ask in response to that remarkable statement. 'How long has Copplestone lived in this time?'

"He has lived for 20,000 years,' the voice replied. 'He might live for 200,000 more, had he no enemies. You might live as long yourself – but first you must return. If you cannot or will not do that, the human race might be doomed to oblivion.'

"I knew, even as I heard these words, that I would have no opportunity to carry forward the inquisition. I could feel the process of dissolution that was already creeping through my phantom flesh – a sensation which was quite unlike any I had ever felt before and yet immediately recognizable.

"While I had hurtled forwards in time I had felt as if I were falling, but moving backwards could not be likened to any kind of ascent. I awoke in sore distress but dared not dose myself with any pain-killing drug until I had written down the formulae communicated to me by the futuristic voice, and that I did with all possible expedition, ignoring all the doctor's entreaties.

"Afterwards, I slept for 14 hours – and when I woke, I was prey to a host of aches and pains. These quickly developed into a terrible fever, which racked me for days on end. The doctor told me, once I had recovered my health, that he had all but given me up for dead – but he had done that more than once before. It was not easy to recover my health and strength, but recover I did – it was not until I returned from my second visionary expedition that I became the peculiar creature you see before you now."

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Not unnaturally, the three wise men hastily assembled to hear the tale had almost as many questions to ask as the time traveller had when confronted with the magnified image of Copplestone's face. I was not surprised, however, that they were similarly brushed aside.

"It is important to maintain the order of events," Death's double insisted, "if you are to arrive at a properly reasoned judgment of the import of my adventure. Much of what you desire to know will be made clear when I tell you what befell me when I returned to the derelict Earth.

"My friend the doctor pointed out that as I had some expertise as a chemist, and was reasonably well-read in the scientific literature, I could have invented all the formulae dictated to me by the dream-voice, and that

they might prove utterly impotent to serve their ostensible purposes. My answer to that, inevitably, was that the proof of the pudding could only be in the eating.

"I consented to be put off for a while, and other problems of the kind which have made my reputation came along to distract me, but I always intended to put the new formulae to the test. As matters transpired, the time came in the early months of this year, a little more than five years after Lugard's replication of Copplestone's last experiment."

My first assessment of the doctor's grey-eyed friend had been that he was a man desperate to live up to his legend – a legend created, innocently enough, by the tales of his exploits concocted by the doctor. Thanks to the accounts which had appeared in the *Strand* the great detective's career had become a modern hero-myth, and he had been credited with the mental powers of a demigod. The real man had had little alternative but to fall prey to a heady cocktail of vanity and anxiety. According to the doctor's romances, he was regularly entrusted by statesmen and monarchs with secret commissions that saved their governments and their crowns. Now – at least according to his own account – he had been entrusted by an immortal with the task of saving not merely mankind but the entire Creation of which mankind was an element. Had any other man – even Napoleon! – ever taken delusions of grandeur to such an extreme?

So prolific an endeavour commanded respect, however, and I was not ashamed to offer it – with only one proviso. I resolved that if ever I should have occasion to venture in my dreams into the furthest wilderness of time, I would bring back reports that would put Mr Sherrinford's to shame. I was not sure how I would do it, given that he had already appropriated to himself the power and the inclination to save and destroy the entire universe, but I promised myself that I would find a way. According to the precepts laid down by the founding fathers of the drama in the days of Attic glory, all tragedies ought to be arranged in trilogies. If the adventures of this animated skeleton were to form the second element of a series begun with Lugard's celebration of *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires* it was obvious that no one but myself could possibly provide a suitable conclusion.

"As the hour approached for my second trial," Death's double continued, "the doctor raised all the obligatory objections. Even so, he consented to administer the syringe – which now contained a fearsomely-complicated cocktail of exotic compounds, some few of which had been extremely difficult to obtain. Again I had asked him to wait with my lightened body throughout the interval of its suspended animation, ready to respond if the heart and lungs should show signs of failure. Again, he had promised to do exactly that.

"The sensation of hurrying through time was not so disconcerting this time, but it was still impossible for me to make any sense of the kaleidoscopic chaos through which I fell. This time I did not black out, not even for an instant. I was alert as soon as my condition stabilized, and I sat up immediately.

"I found myself lying on neatly-cut grass, in the centre of a circular lawn bordered with rhododendrons. The bushes were in full bloom, their purple flowers lux-

uriating in the bright sunlight which streamed through a vast array of hexagonal and octagonal windows which filled the vault of heaven.

"I saw that I was in a huge hemispherical dome whose architecture put the Crystal Palace to shame; its panes of glass seemed to be tinted, for the cloudless sky behind them was a deep indigo blue. I could see five black shapes moving against that background, describing a circle around the dome, but they were too high for the precise forms of their wings to be distinguishable.

"Beyond the rhododendrons I could see the red-tiled roof of a cottage which might have been in some pretty Cotswold village – but the whole scene was redolent with fakery. The colours were too vivid and too uniform; the grass on which I sat was all of a single species and its colour was unnaturally uniform, the clustered stalks gathered as orderly as sheaves of wool in a woven rug. I knew that the Earth could not have warmed again, and that the world beyond the dome must be the world I had seen before. I could only conclude that this dome had been built specifically to receive me, and to welcome me with a scene that I might consider homely.

"I did *not* consider it homely. Nothing could have been more alien, in that dread world, than a sentimental scene displaced from the tinted pages of *Sunday at Home*.

"There were bees buzzing about the rhododendron flowers, but I could not tell whether they were real; I strongly suspected that they were not. There were no birds to be seen or heard. The scented air was oppressively sweet, but it certainly had no shortage of oxygen.

"By the time I had come slowly to my feet, moving my heavy-seeming limbs very deliberately, I was no longer alone. A humanoid figure was moving between the bushes, coming to welcome me with open arms. The figure had a face that had obviously been shaped in imitation of Copplestone's and clothes befitting a man of his class and station, but the image seemed to me to be more parody than homage. The colouring of the flesh was apt enough but its texture was quite wrong, and the creature's gait was far too sinuous. I was sure from the first moment I set eyes on it that this was a machine, however cunningly it had been contrived to resemble the Edward Copplestone of 1895.

"The realization that the other's appearance was not to be trusted led me to look down at my own body. Although it was undoubtedly a phantom of sorts, it was reassuringly opaque and it was clad in a perfectly respectable jacket and tweed trousers – or at least in their appearance. I could not feel the weight of the clothes, nor their friction against my skin. It occurred to me that of the two of us, I might easily be reckoned the poorer simulation of humanity – and yet, I felt that I was entirely real, and wholly myself.

"I have been expecting you," said Copplestone's simulacrum, extending its hand to be shaken.

"I consented to be taken by the hand. 'I hope I am not late,' I replied. 'I followed the instructions I was given as carefully as I could.' The hand that gripped mine did not feel like flesh, but I could not be sure how much of the strangeness was due to the abnormality of my own being.

"I have been here little more than a century," my

host said, as he beckoned me to follow him through the bushes towards the house. 'It has been a curious homecoming, but not at all unpleasant. I wish that you could have come into a haven such as this when you first ventured into the future but we had no idea whether anyone would ever come, or where they would arrive if they did. Had it been Tesla who had duplicated my formula – and I must confess that I thought him the most likely to make the attempt – he might have set off from the American continent and arrived half a world away, on the far side of the frozen ocean. I had, of course, considered the possibility of directing my mechanical servitors to begin the regeneration of the Earth's eco-sphere, but that would have required tens of thousands of years – and the surface is still subject to occasional bombardments.'

"Bombardments?" I queried. We had already reached the doorway of the cottage; Copplestone's simulacrum had put on a show of moving in a leisurely fashion but he had moved swiftly, and he had cast two surreptitious glances upwards even before it had mentioned the word *bombardments*.

"The cottage door was surrounded by a trellis on which honeysuckle had been trained to grow. The assemblage was absurdly quaint. 'Please come in,' said Copplestone's simulacrum, holding the door open. The interior was clean, as if the floors had been recently swept and the wooden surfaces polished.

"I hesitated, caught by the peculiar notion that if I accepted this creature's hospitality I might be bound by some mysterious tacit obligation. 'What are you?' I asked. 'You are not Copplestone, although you look like him.'

"I *am* Edward Copplestone," he replied, without taking offence. 'This is the body which the nanozoos made for me, to renew and ultimately to replace the timeshadow that was drawn into the future when my first body died. I could not have inhabited that frail shell for 30,000 years! Although it is better by far than the one into which I was born, this is my own body; I can assure you that I am no mere copy. The process by which I was renewed was a carefully-controlled metamorphosis, and the continuity of my personality has been maintained, unbroken save for periods of sleep. I still need sleep and I still dream – I have taken care to preserve the greater number of my needs. I must maintain my hunger and my thirst, else even I could not believe that I am Edward Copplestone. Please come in, I beg of you – there is a great deal that I must tell you, and we have not much time.'

"He spoke rapidly, as if he were following a prepared script – but if he had been waiting for me for more than a century, he must have had plenty of opportunity to rehearse.

"I went in. The interior of the cottage was almost as perfect a pastiche as the exterior, although it had no fireplaces – but I did not see the kitchen. I was taken into a sitting-room where I was placed on a horsehair sofa. Its walls were papered with a Morris print and there were a number of oils and water-colours in gilded frames. I had guessed at first that this mockery of a supposed English ideal was intended to make me feel at home, but now I was seized by a different suspicion. I wondered whether it had been built for his benefit rather than mine. If he had long been desperate to

maintain whatever was left of his old self, he might have been easy prey to the impulse to synthesize a little of the old England: the *quintessential* England. I wondered whether its parodic quality could be taken as a measure of his own falsity – and whether, if so, he were fully aware of the extent to which he had become artificial and alien.

“To compound the grotesquerie of the excessively ordinary my companion took a chair which had a side-table placed to its right. A teapot and a milk jug were waiting on the table, with a single cup. Copplestone’s simulacrum poured tea into the cup and added a dash of milk.

“I apologize for my impoliteness,” he said rapidly. “Your present corporeal habitation is incapable of taking nourishment but I have waited an eternity to take tea with someone who understands the significance of taking tea...”

“If you think this charade will convince me that you are the Copplestone I knew before, you are mistaken,” I told him. “It only serves to reinforce the impression of artificiality. Nothing here is real; it is an illustration in a child’s story-book.”

“You’re right, of course,” he said sorrowfully. “This is a fiction, of sorts: a dream within a dream, in fact. It is a mere stage-set, dressed for use in what can only seem to you to be a vision. You are here, and yet you are also lying upon your own bed in your own apartment – in Baker Street, was it not? – and the year is ... what is the year, in your reckoning?”

“Nineteen hundred,” I replied.

“Five years after my death! I should have thought... but that is immaterial. You are anchored still to the year 1900, and to the body which lies upon your bed in a drug-induced coma. Nevertheless, you have a physical presence here and now; you are a very solid dream-projection. If it helps you, think of all this as my solid dream-projection. You have clothed yourself, for reasons of decorum; I have created these surroundings, for reasons of... well, more for the sake of nostalgia than the sake of politeness, if the truth be told. But we are here to save humanity, if we can – and if we can, this dream will vanish like any other dream, into the oblivion of forgetfulness. If things go awry, I might vanish myself, along with the accumulated memories of 30,000 years... but if one cannot learn equanimity in the course of a lifespan like that, one cannot learn anything.”

“I would have thought that in 20,000 years one would have time to learn *everything*,” I said.

“I fear,” he replied, “that you have not the slightest inkling of what *everything* comprises. Nor can you have, unless and until you find your own immortality. I wish that I had more than a matter of hours to tell you what you need to know but I have not, and I cannot be sure that we are safe from interference. I must ask you to listen to me now, and trust me to tell you everything that you need to know. Interruptions, however well-intentioned, will only slow us down. There might be time for questions when I am done, but I fear that there will not.”

“I knew that he was right. My first venture into the future had ended with a thousand questions unanswered, but I knew only too well that I had only the slightest notion of which among those questions most needed to be asked. I did indeed have to trust my

informant’s estimation on that score, at least to begin with – but I also had to bear in mind that I had no proof at all that this really was Edward Copplestone, or that he really did intend to tell me how the human race might be saved from imminent extinction.

“I told him that I would listen patiently until he was done – and he immediately launched into his long-prepared speech.”

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“Copplestone told me that he had been utterly astonished to find himself back in the world which he had glimpsed during his third vision of futurity,” explained the story-teller. “At first, he did not realize that he had died in 1895, and when that became clear to him he had immediately been seized by the suspicion that his death had not been natural and that the relic which now remained had been kidnapped into the future by vampires anxious that he could not give warning of their coming ascendancy. He assured me, however, that his fears had quickly been quieted by the overmen in whose company he was now bound to remain. He had soon been convinced that his presence among them was an accident and that his death had not been caused by them.

“The vampire race had by this time reached what appeared to them to be the end-point of their evolution. Their science had given them complete mastery over their own bodies. They understood the processes of biological determinism which enabled fertilised egg-cells to produce individuals with particular characteristics, and they could vary those characteristics at will, designing entirely new organisms as well as modifying those which already existed. More than that; they could unite their flesh with all manner of machines. They augmented their limbs and their sensory apparatus with all manner of extensions but they also accepted into their blood and their organs legions of tiny machines which they called nanozoons. These nanozoons guaranteed them immunity to the ageing process and to all disease, and they were capable of repairing all but the most terrible injuries.

“The overmen had colonized many of the other worlds of the solar system, modifying their environments very considerably. They had launched hundreds of self-replicating machines – most of them very tiny – into interstellar space, with the aim of exploring the other solar systems which were their neighbours in space. They believed, to begin with, that they were very likely to meet other intelligent beings in the solar systems orbiting suns of the same type as their own, and they were enthusiastic to do so. They were also enthusiastic to find new Earths, inhabited only by more primitive life-forms, which they might colonize and convert into paradises of their own design. They were sorely disappointed when their self-replicating probes brought back news of neighbouring star-systems without discovering the slightest signs of life, even at its most primitive.

“It was so simple and economical to send out exploratory machines no bigger than a man’s thumb that very few of the Earthborn overmen actually ventured into interstellar space themselves. Even when they had perfected the business of mechanical augmentation, so that they might go forth into the greater

universe without taking an elaborate closed ecosystem for their sustenance, the energy-expenditure required to accelerate whole companies to velocities near to that of light seemed excessive. *To know is better than to go* was their philosophy at the time when Copplestone took up permanent residence in their midst. They felt that they could adequately embrace the whole universe by means of their nanozoic intermediaries, and although their numbers continued to increase they had slowed the rate of their population growth to the point at which the solar system seemed to offer adequate *lebensraum* for many millennia to come.

"The overmen thought that their empire was perfectly secure. Having never had that tendency to war among themselves which is so marked among humankind they had no fear at all that their own society might self-destruct as the society of their predecessors had. For thousands of years they confidently believed themselves to be entirely without enemies. They came to think of themselves as Lords of Creation, utterly secure in their hegemony.

"Alas, they were wrong."



I, for one, was glad to hear it. I had begun to weary of these godlike overmen and their patient perfection. I knew that somewhere they must have an attic, and a secret in it whose horror they would not be able to bear. They had begun as stealthy predators, red in tooth if not in claw; it was only fitting that they should meet with predators stealthier and bloodier than themselves. What enemies I could have devised for them, had this only been my dream!

Unfortunately, we were not to meet the vampires' bogeymen just yet.

"At this point," the pseudonymous Sherrinford said, "I ought to communicate to you certain information – some of which Copplestone gave me, and some of which I learned from another source – about the nature of the universe in which we live. You will find these facts amazing, and perhaps rather difficult to comprehend, but I am assured that many of the discoveries in question will be made by human beings in the course of the coming century. If what I am about to tell you is true, it will become known in the next hundred years, and its gradual revelation will constitute a reasonable measure of the accuracy of my vision.

"First of all, the universe is not static; it is constantly evolving. At present, it is expanding; the fabric of space is undergoing a rapid inflation. Calculation suggests

that there was a time in the remote past when the universe was infinitesimally small, and that the inflation in question might be regarded as the consequence of a cosmic explosion.

"Professor Flammarion will confirm, I hope, that space and time are not absolutes providing a framework in which the universe exists, but are relative to one another. According to Copplestone, it was not merely space which came into being at the moment of the primal explosion but time too; no meaning can therefore be attached to the question of what existed, or what happened, *before* the primal explosion. There was no *before* – and yet, however paradoxical it may seem, it is incorrect to think of the primal explosion as a beginning, for beginnings and ends are themselves temporal phenomena.

"Secondly, the universe is much vaster than we have so far supposed. At least some of the objects which today's astronomers call nebulae are not inchoate clouds of luminous gas located within our own sidereal system but entire sidereal systems separated from ours by vast gulfs of darkness. There are more sidereal systems in the universe than there are stars in our own sidereal system, although that number must be reckoned in millions of millions. The expansion of the universe has already proceeded to the point at which these

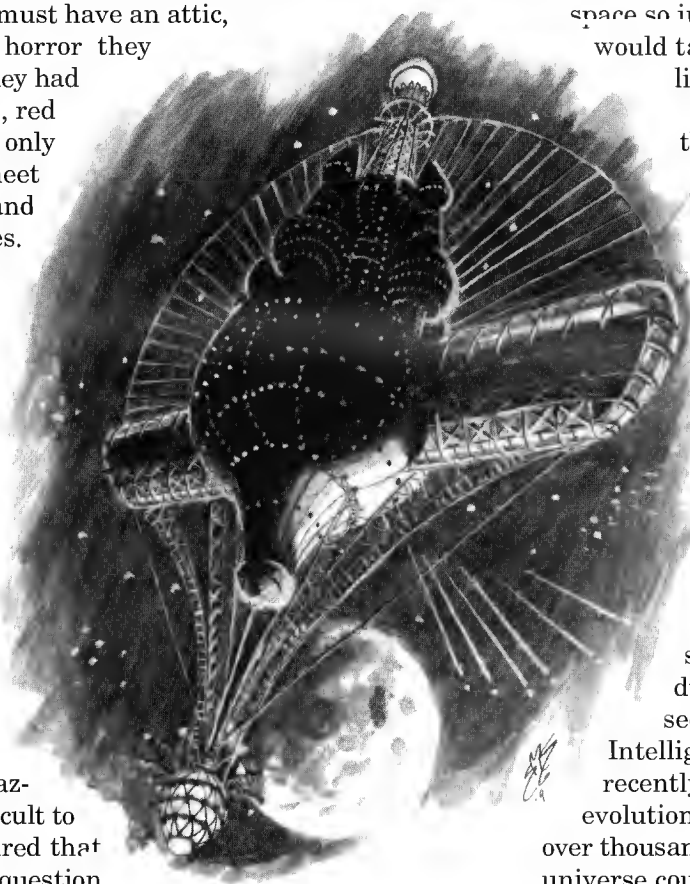
sidereal systems are distributed across a space so immense that a ray of light would take more than 10,000 million years to cross it.

"The suns which lit the universe in its youth, thousands of millions of years ago, were unlike ours. Ours is a second generation sun and the matter which surrounds it, including the planets, is the produce of younger and purer suns whose lifespans culminated in huge explosions. Life like ours – by which I mean all organic life based in the complex chemistry of carbon and all its mechanical extensions – can only be produced in the vicinity of such second-generation suns.

Intelligent life is, as science has recently taught us, the result of evolutionary processes extended over thousands of millions of years. The universe could not have produced anything remotely resembling human beings during the earlier phases of its

expansion. Once having produced beings of that kind, however, it lay open to their examination, exploration and occupation."

Ever since he had invoked Flammarion's name the detective had been looking uneasily at the astronomer, clearly uncertain as to how this remarkable series of assertions would be received. Although he had hoped



"EXPLORATORY MACHINES."

for confirmation on one point, he evidently feared contradiction on the remainder.

Flammarion seemed to be having difficulty making up his own mind as to whether he should object or not – and, if so, to what. “What you say about the nebulae may well be true,” he admitted. “The notion of island universes was proposed by Kant and accepted by Laplace ... and I am more than ready to accept that the universe is vaster and more dynamic than even I have been prepared to suppose. Time and space are certainly relative – I have said as much ... but an expanding universe born in some cosmic explosion is another thing entirely! How will this fact be determined?”

“I did not quite understand that,” the detective admitted. His hand moved slightly, as if to point to his briefcase. “According to the manuscript which contains the revelation, it has something to do with *red shifts* exhibited by the nebulae.”

“Döppler shifts?” Flammarion enquired.

The detective could only shrug his shoulders. I was no wiser myself, but Jarry seemed to understand what was meant by the phrase, although his only response was to mutter “Incroyable!” in an altogether respectful fashion.

“I am sorry,” Death’s double said. “It is necessary that you should know these things, if you are to understand the later parts of my tale – but for now, perhaps it will suffice if I return to what Copplestone told me. That was simple enough, before...”

He broke off, but that was one inference I could take. *Before Lugard complicated matters, I thought.*

We were not to descend to such vulgar matters yet. “At present, we know of eight planets orbiting the sun,” the detective went on, “together with a company of minor planetoids which are distributed between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Copplestone informed me that this account of the solar system is incomplete; far the greater fraction of the extrasolar matter is loosely distributed in a vast ring far beyond the orbit of Neptune. From this dark aureole, matter is occasionally displaced so that it falls towards the sun, taking the form of comets. When the solar system was young it was much more disturbed and comets were so common that they frequently crashed into the planets. The scars of such impacts remain clearly visible on the airless face of the present-day moon, the number of its craters providing eloquent testimony to the intensity of the bombardment.

“Such planetary impacts have nowadays become very rare, but they have not ceased; it is certain that the evolution of life on earth has been interrupted by several cometary collisions, and very probable that human prehistory was interrupted by at least one, whose faint memory is preserved in our legends of the Deluge. All this is, of course, well known to us by courtesy of Professor Flammarion’s popularizing efforts, and he has taken care to warn us that the future history of humankind might yet suffer further interruptions of a similar nature.

“If the visions experienced by Copplestone and myself are true, however, the human species will require no such cosmic catastrophe to put an end to it – that misfortune will be left to the overmen who are fated to succeed us.”

“I cannot put an exact date to the event,” Death’s double went on, “but between 30 and 40,000 years from today some awesomely massive piece of cosmic debris, travelling at a terrific velocity, will pass through the dark aureole which is the solar system’s outer edge. The disruption caused by this object’s passage will displace hundreds of thousands of comets, many of them so huge that they will break up into hosts of tinier entities – and that appalling tide of matter will descend upon the inner planets of the solar system like fiery hail.

“According to Copplestone, the overmen who lived through the cataclysm called this cosmic storm the Hail of Hell; it became their Deluge, their Armageddon. Had they still lived exclusively on the surface of the Earth when the disaster occurred, it would have wiped them out.

“Men of our generation take conditions at the Earth’s surface very much for granted, little realizing how fragile they are. The air that we breathe is not merely essential to the sustenance of life; it is a product of life. The temperature and composition of the atmosphere are no mere accidents; they are conditions created by living organisms for their own benefit, without intelligent purpose but no less cleverly for that. The missiles which rained down upon the planet had only to wreck that balance to rob the evolutionary process of a billion years of little victories.

“The dust displaced into the upper atmosphere by a single cometary collision, or by a powerful volcanic eruption, might cause seven years of unrelenting winter; the dust displaced by these impacts and the volcanoes they awoke brought seven times seven years of unrelenting night. Without the energy of sunlight it was impossible for the grasses on the land and the algae in the sea to renew the atmosphere, whose oxygen had been consumed in a worldwide conflagration – a conflagration which, when it cooled, left the corpse of the world embalmed in ice.

“You and I would have died immediately had today’s world suffered such an apocalypse. The tenacity of their nanozoons ensured that the overmen died much harder – but die they did, in their billions.

“The surface of the Earth was left lifeless, although a few overmen who had taken refuge far below the surface managed to survive and to secure the survival of many other species. Such brief forewarning of the disaster to come as they had had allowed them to build a few subterranean Arks. There were similar Arks on Mars, on Titan, on Europa and on Ganymede, and many small space-habitats – including half a dozen hollowed out within the minor planetoids – also survived. The vast majority of the surviving overmen was, however, located on that face of the moon which is perpetually turned towards the Earth.

“The region in question did not escape its ration of impacts, but that ration was slightly reduced by the shield that the Earth supplied, and because the moon was airless its inhabitants already followed a troglodytic existence, adequately equipped with the means to hoard their air against catastrophic loss. Indeed, the cometary rain briefly supplied an atmosphere of sorts to replace the one which the moon had lost in the long-distant past, and brought a rich bounty of raw mate-

rials – including a great deal of water – which the overmen of the moon were very glad to receive.

“The surviving overmen, Copplestone informed me, had perforce to re-organize their attitudes and their plans for the future. They were compelled to accept a new and more cautious estimation of their place in the universal scheme. Within the cauldron of fear that had been set to seethe by their near-extinction they had to formulate a new ambition and a new purpose.

“They could, had they so chosen, have begun work immediately on the regeneration of the Earth. They had the means to do it: to seed the planet with primitive organisms and nanozoons which could not only live in its depleted environments but begin the work of restoring its atmosphere, its liquid oceans, its savannahs and its forests. It would take thousands of years, but it could be done. But what would be the point, if it only required another trivial disturbance of the cosmic order to undo the work again?

“The overmen had learned a hard lesson from the cataclysm. The seeming stability of the stars in their courses is an illusion, and there is no refuge safe from cosmic turbulence. The universe is, in fact, full of dark and wayward matter invisible to optical telescopes and potentially deadly in effect. The kind of life which requires billions of years of evolution to convert tiny bacteria into beings capable of intelligent thought is essentially frail, and its progress is subject to many interruptions, any one of which might prove conclusive. Wherever such life might appear, they realized, it would live under threat of casual annihilation – and always would, if it consented to remain planet-bound.

“The overmen had survived the Hail of Hell because they were no longer planet-bound, but they had lost more than nine-tenths of their empire because they had been planet-based. They concluded that this had been a mistake that must now be remedied. They decided that if they were to have a future at all, it must lie outside the Earth and outside the solar system of which Earth was a part. They decided that the world which had spawned them must be abandoned to its fate while they looked in a new direction – not even for

new Earths to colonize, but for entirely new modes of existence independent of planets.

“Knowing, as they did, that the states and empires of the sun were vulnerable to the hostility of barbarians without, and could not be efficiently defended against them the surviving overmen began to think in terms of exodus. They would not consent to live in a state of siege, and they could no longer be content to delegate the task of exploring and exploiting the universe to their mechanical surrogates.

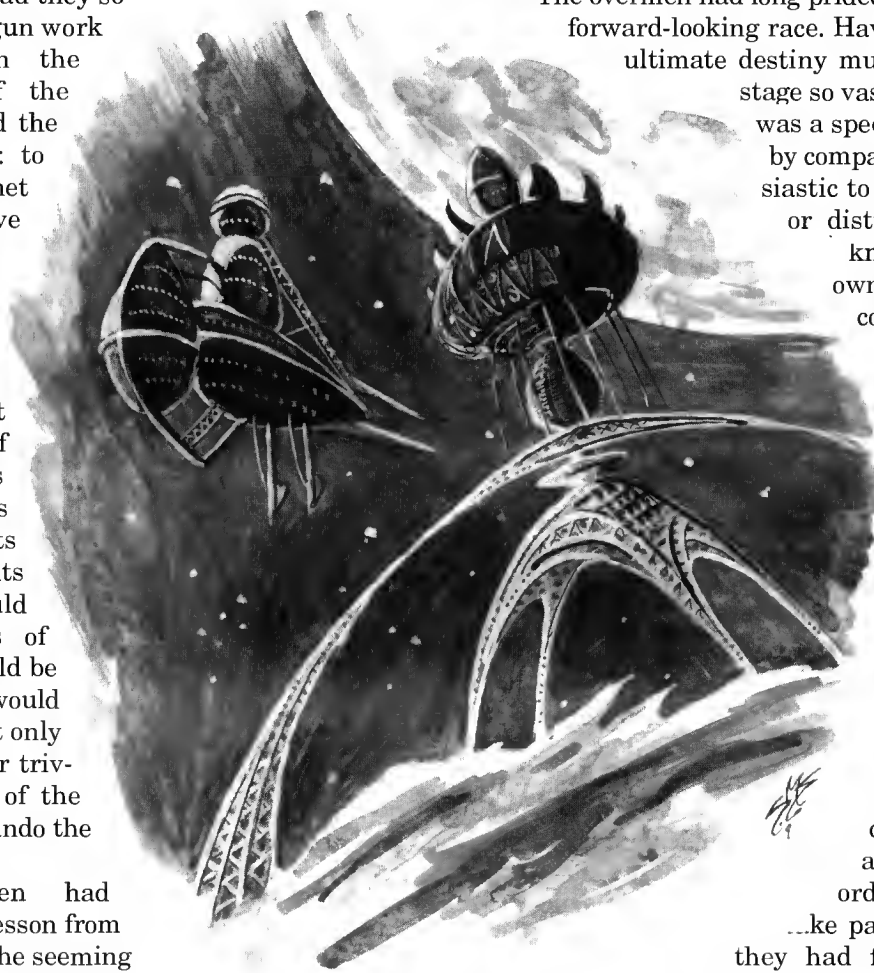
“The overmen had long prided themselves in being a forward-looking race. Having decided that their ultimate destiny must be played out on a stage so vast that the solar system was a speck of infinitesimal dust by comparison they were enthusiastic to proceed without delay or distraction. They already knew how to adapt their own bodies in order to live comfortably in low-gravity environments and on distant worldlets, partly by reformulating their flesh and partly by hybridizing themselves with machines, but such radical transformations had earlier been the practice of a tiny minority. Now they decided that it was time for each and every one of them to embrace even the most drastic reformulations and hybridizations, in order that they might all take part in the mission that they had formerly delegated to their minuscule instruments.

“Copplestone told me that the overmen embarked upon this scheme with a fervent missionary zeal. Those who were quickest to decide that they would become pilgrims – pilgrims whose progress would be eternal – also became avid for the conversion of their less eager fellows. The whole race was soon infected with a new fervour of commitment and an urgent sense of destiny. Copplestone suggested that some such renaissance of religious feeling had been inevitable, and was perhaps overdue. At any rate, the minority who were more cautious in their opinions and ambitions was inexorably reduced, even the dissenters being conscripted into the project by one means or another.”



Is it always thus? I wondered, while the narrator paused to cough into his gnarled hand.

I had no difficulty following the great detective's narrative thrust once he had laid down the analogy of pilgrims hastening upon their progress: immortal minds committed to the task of raising their own Celestial



‘THE DESERTION OF THE EARTH.’

City and defining their own Heaven. I could easily understand how beings of that sort might proclaim themselves an Elect fully entitled to conscript the efforts of more dubious individuals. That was the missionary spirit in all its glory: the spirit that would gladly venture forth into unknown space, but would insist on dragging with it an appalling burden of creeds and commandments, enthusiastic to infect the universe with its own particular delusions.

I said nothing aloud, of course. I was as reluctant to interrupt Sherrinford's narrative flow as he must have been to interrupt Copplestone's. Time did not press on me quite so urgently as it had pressed upon his dream-self, but I was acutely aware of its passing. Every moment of life had become a cruel tyrant, but Death retained his ultimate hegemony in the hierarchy of my fears. I do not know whether to call it cowardice or courage, but no matter how tortuous time and life became, I was anxious to extend them to their limit.

"The desertion of the Earth and its neighbourhood in space was a minor corollary of this grandiose project," Death's double went on. "The overmen retained numerous bases within the solar system but Earth was not one of them. They emptied its underground Arks into vessels designed for interstellar flight, leaving nothing behind but empty desolation. As Copplestone told me that he looked around, at the walls of the little cottage he had built inside the hemispherical dome, as if he were reassuring himself that they were still solid against the desolation of which he spoke.

"The moon was the last outpost of the overmen made of flesh and blood: those who still carried the mirror-image of their human cousins in their favourite form. They could easily have remade Copplestone in some newer image had he asked it of them; he might, if he had been so inclined, have joined the great exodus. He refused, clinging to the semblance and the spirit of his humanity. Unlike the overmen, Copplestone wanted the Earth to be more than a grave. He was content to let it remain a mute memorial for a few thousand years, but not forever. He wanted the Earth to be renewed – *but not as a home for overmen*. Now that the overmen had done with it, he wanted it for humankind. He wanted his own species to have a second chance, in order that it might seek and find a better destiny than war and strife had made for it before.

"He did not have to keep this project secret from those few overmen who remained in the solar system. They assumed that what he planned to do was simply to manufacture a host of androids like himself: mere simulacra of something long extinct. Now that they were embarked upon a mass-metamorphosis into forms that were far more ambitious and far more exotic they could only regard such creatures as dolls of no intrinsic interest, mere copies of their creator. In fact, Copplestone hoped for a resurrection of a different kind. He hoped that the empty Earth might be repopulated by real individuals transplanted from an earlier era exactly as he had been. Although only one other human time-traveller had appeared out of the mists of history before the Hail of Hell, Copplestone clung steadfastly to the hope that more might one day come – and that if adequate preparation could be made for them the human race might live again upon the surface of the world it had lost.

"So that is why you set machines to wait for me," I said, when he had laid this scheme before me. "And that is why you think my arrival so important. You want me to become your envoy to the 20th century, to sound a clarion call on your behalf. You want me to spread your formula far and wide, so that those brave enough to use it might become the inheritors of the future Earth."

"Yes," Copplestone said, "that is exactly what I want. But there is more that you need to know. All this is merely the beginning..."

"As he spoke these words we both looked up in alarm, because a terrible sound had interrupted his sentence. It was not an explosion, but it was extremely loud and once it had started it did not stop.

"As we leapt to our feet I saw that Copplestone's lips were still moving, but there was no possibility of hearing what he had to say. I did not need him to tell me what was happening; I had already deduced that, and I knew how dreadful it was. The dome enclosing that tiny and pathetic imitation of the England of old had been smashed. Its warm and life-giving atmosphere was rushing out, to be replaced by air that had no sustenance in it and was cold enough to strike a human dead. The little cottage in which we sat was already being shaken apart, its roof peeling back to expose the unwindowed sky beyond.

"I saw then that I had been mistaken in thinking that the glass of the dome was tinted; the sky beyond was really indigo in colour, and not because night was falling. The sun was still high, still blazing with what now appeared to be awful fury.

"My God! I thought. *I am lost! I shall die within my dream!*

"Had I presumed that the collapse of Copplestone's protective dome was accidental I might have been able to quell the panic that rose within my breast, but the moment I saw that uncanny sky I also saw that it was alive with machines: flying machines shaped like huge bats and flying machines with other, very different, shapes, which I could not liken to anything I knew. These multitudinous entities were hurling bolts of fire in every direction – downwards most of all. The enclave which Copplestone had built to receive me was under fierce attack, and I knew that it could not be safely defended.

"Even as I looked up to see my doom descending an enormous host of buzzing flies began to fill the air, as thick as the worst imaginable swarm of tropical locusts – and they fell upon my flesh with every evidence of avid hunger!"

To be concluded next month



Brian Stableford's "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires," the short novel which precedes the above one, was published in *Interzone* issues 91-92 (January-February 1995). It has since appeared in slightly expanded hardcover book form, under the same title, from Mark V. Ziesing Books in the USA.

What ghastly news, echoing down the corridors of e-mail, made strong authors blench and Colin Greenland type "AAAARRGGGH-HHH!!!!"? Our little friend Rachel Oliver is back. Long-time readers may recall various British sf authors being plagued with handwritten (or ill-typed) letters from this infant of the million pseudonyms, an allegedly young, allegedly ailing, alleged female who went on to forge terrible TV sf submissions from such unmused writers as S. Baxter, C. Greenland and D. Langford. See *Interzone* 95. Now the horror begins anew, in America.... Dr Robert L. Forward (for it is he) has been receiving erudite letters from Yorkshire lasses "Julie Johnson (9)" – "I have a 9 year old granddaughter, and the difference in vocabulary was so amazing I was suspicious, but I responded with reprints since 'she' sent a SASE (unstamped)." – and "Rachel Oliver (8)." Suspicion grew, and an Internet search led him to my own exposé of the mysterious hoaxer who in reality seems to be called F. R. Oliver. Bob Forward is hopping mad ... but that nice Mr Greenland offers a slender thread of hope, in our correspondent's almost inimitable style: "Actually, I notice little Rachel is even younger now than when she used to write to me. Does this mean that in some way she is aging backwards and will soon reach 'Zero Years Old' and disappear? – Just a thought – You might use this plot for one of your 'science fiction books' –"

THE FUTURE IS TEKON

Lionel Fanthorpe was eager to comment on the latest "Rennes-le-Château mystery" revelation, *The Tomb of God* by Richard Andrews and Paul Schellenberger: "After 20 years plus of Rennes investigation, I'd say absolutely, finally and categorically that there is more likelihood of finding the embalmed body of Donald Duck inside Mount Cardou than of finding the body of Jesus in there!" The *Tomb* authors were last seen planning to sue BBC2 for similar sentiments expressed in a *Timewatch* programme, so be careful.... Meanwhile, despite this potboiler's good UK sales, John Gribbin reports that "the book has failed in the US with less than 1,000 copies sold. Who said Americans are gullible?"

Elisabeth Gille. *Peter Nicholls* writes: "French editor (and my dear friend) Elisabeth Gille died – too young but not too painfully – on Sept 28. I have few specifics; her daughter Marianne told me she had 'a lung problem.' (Elisabeth had been quite a smoker.) She was around my age, I think: in the late 50s. She was well known to and well liked by many sf people of my generation, who remem-



ber her intelligence and grace, her sharp wit, and the excellent work she did when she was in charge of the Éditions Denœl sf line in the late 1970s, which she built up into perhaps France's premier sf list (Aldiss, Bester, Clarke, and so on through the alphabet)."

Simon R. Green had fun at Fantasycon ... "Michael Marshall Smith came up with a new game: questions that can only be answered by the phrase, 'You can just fuck right off.' In his case: 'How's the *Weaveworld* adaptation doing?' In my case: 'How many more *Deathstalker* books are there going to be?'" Sensitive souls, these writers.

Stan Nicholls, reviewing Clive Parker's *Sci-Fi and the Internet*, puked at "the dreadful word 'sci-fi' (a derogatory term among aficionados)" ... in a *Time Out* column which is unfortunately titled *Sci-Fi Books*.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Mad Penguin Disease. Because I am a kindly soul, I don't really want to go on and on at Penguin for their lame-brained publicity stunt of a computer virus hoax. However ... the lie is still circling Internet, always one step ahead of the truth, and Penguin's Guy Gadney has developed a damage-control response which irritatingly glosses over little matters like culpability: "There is an Interactive Novel which you can access from the Penguin Books homepage at www.penguin.co.uk called 'Irina' after the main character Irina Zotova. This has conflicted with reports of a virus called Irina which does not exist and the Professor Edward Prideaux mentioned is a character in the story. The virus rumour has been checked by experts in the UK and it has been confirmed that there is currently no 'Irina' virus to guard against and that an email

erroneously circulated to a mailing list was at the root of this rumour." Gosh! Admiring this wholehearted apology, this eager readiness to shoulder blame, one is compelled to the realization that Guy Gadney is wasted in publishing and should take up politics. As soon as possible.

British Fantasy Awards. Novel: Graham Joyce, *Requiem*. Collection/Anthology: *Last Rites & Resurrections* ed Andy Cox. Short: Michael Marshall Smith, "More Tomorrow." Small Press: *The Third Alternative* ed. Andy Cox. Artist: Josh Kirby. Special: Mike O'Driscoll & Steve Lockley for "Welcome to my Nightmare." Most boggled author: John Grant, who learned only after the presentation that his "The Glad Who Sang a Mermaid In From the Probability Sea" (*IZ95*) had been a short-fiction finalist.

Magazines. *Critical Wave*, the Birmingham-based sf newsletter founded in 1987, is ceasing publication for numerous glum reasons; one last issue, for subscribers only, is expected in 1997. Meanwhile, Andrew I. Porter's *SF Chronicle* has a new e-mail address (105047.1667@compuserve.com) and UK agent (Rob Hansen, 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, E6 1AB).

Memento Mori. As the end of the year approached, a correspondent reminded me ... "*Let us forget*: in this year 1996 Robbie was sold to the Weston family." Ah, yes.

Would You Believe It? Asteroid 1982 VA1 (6630) has been officially named "Skepticus" to honour the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal ... "Csicopus" being rejected as inadequately dignified. The International Astronomical Union has named other asteroids for CSICOP's Paul Kurtz, Martin Gardner and James Randi.

Blurbismo. *Brian Aldiss* shares a painful memory ... "The cowboy who concocted the blurb for Leisure Books' 1975 edition of *The Eighty-Minute Hour* subtly combines flattery with insult: 'You may have to wait until 2001 to read a better Aldiss. But don't count on it.' It's the remark of a man who could not make out what the hell the book was about. There many readers have followed him."

Retro-Hugos. The 1997 World SF Convention, LoneStarCon (Texas) has decided not to continue the immemorial tradition, begun in 1996, of golden-oldie Hugos for material half a century old.

Thog's Masterclass. "It was dark out on the surface, menacingly, cryogenically dark ..." (Ben Bova, *Moonrise*.) No doubt it was fuliginously cold as well

I'm reclining on Mike Marshall Smith's lounge floor, waiting for the man who has "most likely to succeed" running through him like the lettering in a stick of rock, to make the coffee. My gaze is inevitably drawn to his impressive book collection; nestled within this is an equally impressive – and growing – collection of awards from the British Fantasy Society: for his first published short story ("The Man Who Drew Cats"), for Best Newcomer, for his second published story ("The Dark Land"), for his first novel (Only Forward), and now a World Fantasy Award nomination for Best Novella. Does this tell you something?

Reflecting on such meteoric success, I turn away from the books and into the face of one of Mike's two cats. She gives a knowing cat look before deftly butting my tape recorder to the floor, and as man and cat wrestle for control of the small electronic device I hear Mike returning with the drinks...

What were you like as a child?
Quiet, serious, and did a hell of a lot of reading. Quite solitary because of the way that I grew up; we lived in America until I was about seven, then South Africa for about a year, and Australia for a while. I got used to being my own company.

Are you able to draw on this travelling around in your writing?
To a degree, in the sense that my the writing often has a strong sense of rootlessness, of treating "Nowhere in Particular" as a place. Some of my favourite areas are interzones, airports and malls. I love that feeling that you could be absolutely anywhere. The heroes in the novels are both displaced people. Both Stark and Jack Randall (from *Spare*) stand on the outside looking in. There is certainly a degree of that in my own world view: that is probably quite common with writers and arrogant bastards everywhere.

Both the novels are written in the first person. Do you feel that is a necessary part of portraying convincing characters?

It's the most comfortable and relaxed way for me to write at the moment. Especially after *Only Forward*, I just found that first person was much more direct and personal. Getting inside somebody's head in a personal way is quite an interesting thing for me, so I'm favouring the direct route.

Your books really defy categorization into any genre. How do you feel about being categorised as a particular style or type of writer?

I know that I'm not going to be able to avoid writing with bits of crime, and bits of sf, bits of horror and bits of mainstream. I read all of them and I want to write books that I would like to read. It will be interesting to see whether or not I can get away with resolutely ignoring these labels. I wouldn't mind being categorized if it didn't put people off, but sadly it does, particularly mainstream readers. There's nothing pejorative about being labelled as mainstream, whereas sf books are thought of as the preserve of dweebs.

What prompted you to start writing?
It's something that I've always had in mind because my dad's a writer, albeit of non-fiction. He's an academic, and has written a great deal on social inequality, geographical distribution and recently on morality. I wrote a lot of comedy sketches at university and thought that might be an interesting thing to do, but just at the end of college I began to lose interest in the idea of the straightfor-

ward comedy thing and decided that prose writing, particularly horror, would be more interesting.

How did your first break come about?
There was a joint first break, in that the first story accepted was "The Dark Land," which Nicholas Royle took for the anthology which he subsequently called *Dark Lands*. That wasn't the first story to be actually published, though. I met Nick when we were both working at a company called IVCA. We got on immediately and he gave me the address of Clarence Paget, who was publishing *The Pan Book of Horror*, so I sent a story along to him. He had either died or stopped or lost interest or something so Kathy Gale passed it along to Steve Jones, who was just about to do *Dark Voices*, and he took it for *Dark Voices 2*. That story ("The Man Who Drew Cats") went on to win the British Fantasy Award for best short story. So either way I probably owe the break to Nick, like so many other people.

Looking back on your career, do you feel that you got more of a high from that first sale than the first publication of your novel?
They were both just about as extraordinary as each other.

Have you come to terms with your success? The fact that you've come so far so quickly?

Have I? *Spare* has only just been published. Who knows how many copies it will sell – if any. I have no idea whether the Americans will like it. I have no idea whether it will be filmed. I have this reputation for being a huge pessimist but I'm not – I'm enormously optimistic, otherwise I wouldn't even try to be a writer. I just don't think you can really settle into thinking you've got anywhere, or achieved anything, until you're on your third, fourth or fifth book. I'm not sure I even qualify for "flash in the pan" status yet. It's going very nicely so far but it's still only rung two of a very long ladder. I'm here for the long haul.

Do you feel that horror has been ghettoized, and therefore undergoes closer scrutiny as to what objective it fulfils?
I'm sorry to go about this, but a mainstream novel doesn't have to fulfil a function – so why should a horror or sf novel? It just happens to be yet another advantage of our genres that it can deal with all of the personal and emotional and conceptual things that a mainstream novel can, but it can also tackle some more deep-rooted concerns which a lot of mainstream novels don't get around to.

Your writing works almost in reverse. With *Only Forward* we have this roller coaster ride through someone's darkest fantasies, yet within this there is an almost Proustian image of love regained. Within the near-future bedlam of *Spares* there is a powerful theme of redemption and atonement swimming just below the surface.

There are extremely profound statements within your writing; is this the most important element to your writing?

Yes. I'm far more interested in trying to say something about the way in which someone who doesn't like themselves very much can try to redeem their personality, than I am necessarily about talking fridges. I like the talking fridge bits too, because they amuse me and I hope that it will amuse other people, but the bigger issues are the core. The thing is – if I tried to write about those issues within a mainstream novel I couldn't be fucked. Middle-aged people having affairs with each other and agonizing about their au pairs isn't an interesting enough canvas. With science fiction or horror or dark fantasy or crime not only can you do the "quality" stuff but you can have fun with all the other things: you can have your talking fridges and people running around with guns and weird creatures out of the night. Phil Dick, for example, was dealing with ideas that are far more interesting than those you'll find in most mainstream novels, but he did them in very weird science fiction. James Ellroy's *Black Dahlia* packs an unbelievable emotional punch, but it's crime. If you can have that as well then why not have it? It's a way of keeping me entertained, and a way of keeping other people entertained, whilst dealing with the big stuff.

You seem very bullish about genre fiction, as opposed to "mainstream."

I am. I'm sick and fucking tired of apologizing for the fact that my stuff is set in the future, or has weird things in it. There comes a point in people's lives, it would appear, when they can't seem to think or talk about anything except three things: houses; marriage; babies. This is what mainstream literature is for. It's for people whose horizons have contracted so far that anything which goes beyond them becomes inexplicable. Strangely, it's different in film. People will go in droves to see *Independence Day* (sf), *Jurassic Park* (sf), *Silence of the Lambs* (horror), *Seven* (crime, horror). They'll sit and watch Ruth Rendell and *The X-Files* and *Morse* and *Murder One* and *Frost* on television. And so will I. Fine. But in bookstores? Oh no. We don't go to the genre sections. Why? Horror, sf and

crime have access to a whole wealth of ideas, symbolism and traditions which mainstream fiction can't even touch. They can cover relationships, philosophy, the endless variation of life – and raise it to levels which Hampstead novels simply don't have available to them. They can move people, scare them, instil them with that all too rare thing – a sense of wonder. So what is this problem that people have with genre fiction?

I'll tell you what. They grew up. They stopped wondering how long infinity is, and worry instead about how long it will be until they're promoted. They stopped being afraid of what's under the bed, and started being afraid of their paunch. The only time they think about crime is when they worry if their area is part of Neighbourhood Watch. And yet that stuff is still out there. The universe. Death. Murder. All the big subjects, the ones which cut at the heart of what it is to be human, what it is to be alive. I'm actually writing mainstream books, as far as I'm concerned. I want to write novels which are of sufficient quality to hold their heads up in any drawing room or literary launch, but which retain a sense of wonder, of the unknown, of the impossible, of the frightening and funny currents which run through everyone's life. If that means they end up being set in the future, or feature a crime, or have things which seem impossible, so be it. And if mainstream readers can go with that, great. If not, fuck 'em. They can catch up in ten years time, when the ideas we're writing about now are commonplace. Everyone's getting really excited about the possibilities of the internet right now; and yet *Neuromancer* was published a decade ago. It's like, "Yes, hello – we already know about this stuff. Weren't you guys listening?"

Do you feel that your novels will always be set in an alternate situation, it won't be the real life of today?

Well, *Only Forward* is set in something like the 24th or 25th century, *Spares* is set in the beginning of the 22nd. The next one is going to be set in something like 2020 or 2030. I seem to be coming closer to the contemporary with each novel so it's certainly not out of the question. The good thing about writing in the future is that you can make up so much stuff, and you can have jokes and situations that you just can't work in with contemporary novels. You have that freedom, there's less of a credibility gap. You can just go wild.

In your novels the central characters are always incomplete or damaged personalities. Do you feel that a character can be interesting without

Going to Spares

**Michael
Marshall Smith**
*interviewed by
Chris Smith*

being damaged?

I don't believe that there's anyone alive who doesn't have some darkness to them. Something that they have to deal with all the time. That is often what draws us to people, and which makes them distinctive. Perfect faces are boring; likewise personalities.

There is a potent theme of childhood within your work. Is this something that you would like to expand upon in future books?

All of the places where I grew up are someplace else: they are at least as far away as the other side of the Atlantic. I don't generally have a feeling of continuity with that time. In trying to access that part of my life... it's like a swimming pool 30 feet deep. Sometimes I feel like I can only go down to ten or 20 feet, that there is a level underneath to which I can't actually get. I think by trying to explore those times in fiction, I may be able to get right down to the bottom and access all 30 feet of my life.

Anyway, to answer the question rather than just crapping on like someone at a rebirthing event, I was surprised to find that childhood ended up being an element of *Only Forward* and *Spares*, because it's not something I think about very often. But the books are in some ways really quite personal, and it's almost as if that's come bubbling up in spite of myself. It's very probable that will happen again.

Each book contains an epiphany, and that epiphany is a childhood recollection.

Yeah, I do think it's interesting that one hour of one afternoon when you're four may be with you until you die, and will influence your life and the lives of everybody who comes into contact with you. It's fractal, the way that the beating of some butterfly's wings will either make, or fuck up, or at the very least complicate your world for the rest of your life. That can also happen when you're 20, or 35, or course, but it seems like there's a particular leverage if it happens early.

Spares is pretty graphic. Is there anything that you couldn't, or wouldn't write?

I will write anything so long as it is making a worthwhile point. I have never yet done a sex scene, for example, and I will never do one unless it becomes relevant either to the character or to the development of the plot. Similarly, I'm not going to write in a sensationalist scene of either physical or mental horror simply to prove that I've got a bigger mental dick than anybody else.

Anne Sexton spoke of "writing myself sane." Do you feel any compulsion to exorcise?

Definitely. In some ways I started writing prose to do that. The first short stories were an attempt to have some cathartic effect, some influence, on a relationship which was finishing. I'm not sure of the degree to which it actually works. The idea behind "The Man Who Drew Cats" was if something really bad happens to you then, if you can paint it, get it out of your body, you can walk away from it. To a degree that is true of writing, but it's no panacea.

Some of your writing is quite hallucinatory. Do you use your dreams and nightmares as a springboard for your stories?

Big chunks of *Only Forward* were dreams. A number of the short stories started off with dreams, and one of the main plot threads of *One of Us* will be something that I dreamt. Generally, I'm pretty lucky with my dreams in that they're interesting and memorable. Herrick or some similar dead poet guy wrote something like: by day we all inhabit the same reality, "But by night we're hurled/ Each one, into a several world." Let's face it – it's really weird and interesting that all of us have this uncontrollable and individual inner reality.

You had a pretty demanding 1995 writing the first draft of the Weaveworld screenplay. Did this translate into a darker mood within Spares?

The two projects didn't really cross over. The *Weaveworld* gig was actually quite a fun process. They had me flown out to LA several times, which gave me the opportunity to buy nice salad dressings, and it was good to have a proper attempt at screenwriting. It was hard work but I need that. I need to have deadlines, I need to be pushed. Regarding *Spares*, I like dark stuff and believe that it needs to be explored sometimes.

With your work on Weaveworld, did you discover a passion for screenwriting or was that something that was already there?

I'd always had that. Almost for as long as I'd been writing prose I'd been tinkering around with screenplays, but I think you need something to really get your teeth into – and to deal with the actual system itself – to understand what is involved. Tangling with LA is only for the very patient or stubborn.

Do you feel that your prose style lends itself to an easy transition to screenwriting?

When I'm writing and it's going well

it is like I'm describing what I'm seeing in my head. If it's going badly then it's just a collection of words. I can never remember people's names, yet I will never forget a face. That possibly indicates that there isn't too much of a stretch between the two.

One of your current projects is a treatment of Jay Russell's Celestial Dogs. How is that going?

Celestial Dogs is a supernatural detective story, with lots of Japanese demons and in-jokes about Hollywood. It's an excellent read and will make a cracking horror movie. I have a partnership with Stephen Jones and we're going to go out there and develop some genre projects. It's going really well at the moment, and there's a lot of interest. I'm also writing a couple of other adaptations, including of Robert Faulcon's *The Stalking*.

Can you see yourself focusing more on your screenwriting than your novel writing?

No, I will always try to do both because they each have their own advantages and disadvantages. Writing prose is great because it's very personal: but on the other hand it can quite lonely and boring. Screenwriting is a great mental challenge: it's like a game, structuring a story around audience psychology. But sometimes you just want to write what you want to write and not feel like you're in a remake of *The Player*. The ideal would be keeping them both going in tandem.

The film rights for Spares have just been optioned by Steven Spielberg in a million-dollar deal. Is it correct that it's been fast-tracked, which means it's less likely to be left in a dusty pile somewhere in Hollywood?

Who knows, to be honest. I hope so. The schedules of Hollywood are writ in water, but it's already being read by writers and directors. Spielberg is allegedly taking a personal interest, although he won't be directing. Frankly, I'm just unbelievably psyched that anything of mine has been read by him.

Is it true that Robert De Niro wants to play the lead role?

Well, maybe. Four groups put bids in for it: DreamWorks, Hollywood Pictures, Robert De Niro's production company Tribeca, and Mel Gibson's company. The last two got Universal and Paramount behind them to put in bids. My dream casting would be Mel Gibson or Jeff Bridges as Randall and Robert De Niro as Vinaldi. If anyone could talk them into it then that would be rather nice.

Would you like the opportunity to do the screenplay?

I feel it's better that the grown-ups have a crack at it. I'm not yet at the stage where I feel that I could confidently tackle a book like *Spares*. There's lots of complex back-story and special effects that would be involved and, you know, the best screenwriters are very fucking good at what they do.

You're not concerned with how they'll treat your book?

I'm very concerned, and I would certainly like to be involved in the development process. But I would like to see it done from an objective viewpoint, and I'm a little too close to it at the moment.

*Are there any reasons why *Spares* was set in America?*

Yeah, a number of reasons. One was I find it a more appealing milieu to write in. Second is that the story required it. There's also some truth in the notion that if you want to sell in America you have to set it in America.

Yet *Only Forward* sits outside any specific geographical location and works despite that. It works in the sense that it doesn't piss anybody off. I'm certainly not going to say that for commercial reasons I'll only ever set things in the States. There's no reason why England can't be just as interesting a setting as America. *Spares* needed to be set in America because of its subject matter. Certain types of story are just not credible when set in this country, which is one of the reasons why a lot of the big movies are set in the States. You can believe a small town being wiped off

the map in the States, for example: in this country you'd see it on the news and *The Sun* would be setting up an appeal and Lady Di would be out there in a trice, wringing her hands for the camera. Conversely, there are certain types of stories that you can't set in the States, so it's good that people like Kim Newman and Nick Royle and a bunch of other people are insisting on setting their stuff here. Kim writes superb novels which have a real sense of England, and Nick is very strong on London and Eastern Europe. Ramsey Campbell, of course, is stunning on the North – as is Mark Morris. Each to their own. I just feel more confident with the States.

Are there any particular scary moments from books or film that stick in your mind?

The scariest thing that I've ever seen in a book is in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* when Gage dies, and you think, "I know what he's going to do, and it would really be a really, really bad idea. Oh, no, don't do that..." Films tend not to scare me that much. In fact the most recent thing that did scare me was from an *X-Files* episode, believe it or not, from the first series where Scully's dad dies and she sees him in a dream. You can see his lips moving but not what he's saying. There was something about that I found really frightening. That's something that a lot of horror films forget: keep it simple. The first *Nightmare on Elm Street* is so effective because it has things like the long arms scraping along the wall and you're thinking, "Ooh, that's a proper dream thing. I don't like that at all." That's the stuff that works.

Do you keep an ideas notebook?

Yes. Well, I keep an ideas file on the computer, which is now longer than both the novels put together. I need it because I've got a memory like a sieve. I don't use it on a day to day basis – it's not like I can cut and paste chunks of it into current stories – but it is a valuable mine for ideas. One day I intend to print it off and spend a couple of evenings sifting through it. Or maybe I should just give it a title and have them market it as "experimentalist."

What's your next novel going to be about?

It's called *One of Us* and is going to be set in the not too distant future. It's going to be about memories, love, dreams, God, and it's going to have lots of guns in it. Big fucking guns.

What is your worst habit?

Bluntness. I've got a very short attention span. Particularly in conversations. I value clarity and conciseness more than anything else, and people who have a Sunday-supplement approach to talking in the hope that they will eventually churn out something interesting drive me fucking spare. Generally, if something is worth saying, it's worth saying in 25 words or less. Which neatly undermines just about everything I've said in this interview. Fuck it. What do I know?

What would you have engraved on your headstone?

"Can I have my money now, please?"

I asked Mike Marshall Smith, at very short notice, to compile a list of books and films which had inspired his work. Here's what he came up with:

Books:

Lucky Jim
by Kingsley Amis

The Talisman
by Stephen King and Peter Straub

The Martian Chronicles
by Ray Bradbury

The Killer Inside Me
by Jim Thompson

A Scanner Darkly
by Philip K. Dick

The Night People
by Jack Finney

Films:

Pinocchio

Close Encounters of the Third Kind

L.A. Story

Blade Runner

It's a Wonderful Life



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SAVE AS...

Michael Marshall Smith

As soon as I walked out of the hospital I knew what I was going to do.

It was one a.m. by then, for what little difference that made. I was on hospital time, crash time, blood time; somehow misplaced, as if I'd believed that what happened must have taken place in some small pocket of horror outside the real world, where the normal rules of progression and chronology don't apply. Of course it must have taken time, for the men and women in white coats to run the stretcher trolleys down the corridors, shouting for crash teams and saline; to cut through my wife's matted clothes and expose wet ruins where once all had been smooth and dry; to gently move my son's head so that its position in relation to his body was the same as it had always been. All of this took time, as did the eventual slow looks up at me, the quiet shakes of the doctors' heads, the forms I had to sign and the words I had to listen to.

Then the walk from the emergency room to the outside world, my shoes making quiet tapping sounds on the linoleum as I passed rows of people with bandaged fingers. That took the most time of all.

The air in the car park was cool and moist, freshened by the rain. I could smell the grass which grew in the darkness beyond the lamps' pools of yellow light, and hear in the distance the sound of wet tyres on the free-way. Tyres which, I hoped, would retain their grip, safely transport the cars' passengers to their homes. Tyres which wouldn't fail under a sudden braking to avoid a car which had slewed into their path, hurtling the vehicles together.

I suddenly realized that I had no means of getting home. The remains of the Lexus were presumably lying like some uncompleted toy by the side of the road where the accident had taken place, or had been taken off to a wrecker's yard. For a moment the problem took up the whole of my mind, unnaturally luminescent: and then I realized both that I could presumably call a cab from reception, and that I didn't really care.

Two orderlies walked across the far side of the lot, a faint laugh carrying to me. The smell of smoke in their

wake reminded me I was a smoker, and I fumbled a cigarette from the packet in my jacket pocket.

The carton was perfectly in shape, the cigarette unbent. One of the very few things Helena and I had ever argued about was my continued inability to resist toying with death in the form of tubes of rolled tobacco. Her arguments were never those of the zealot, just measured and reasonable.

She loved me, and Jack loved me, and she didn't want the two of them to be left alone. The fact that the crash which had crushed her skull had left my cancer sticks entirely unmolested was a joke which she would have liked and laughed at hard. For a moment I hesitated. I couldn't decide whether Helena's death meant I should smoke the cigarette or not.

Then I lit it and turned to walk back to reception. If I was going to go through with it, I didn't have much time.

The cab dropped me at the corner of Montaigne and 31st. I overtipped the driver – who'd had to put up with a sudden crying jag which left me feeling cold and embarrassed – and watched the car swish away down the deserted street. The cross-roads was bleak and exposed; an empty used-car lot and burnt-out gas station taking two corners, run-down buildings of untellable purpose squatting kitty corner on the others. It couldn't have been more different from the place where I'd originally gone to visit the Same Again Corporation, an altogether more gleaming street in the heart of the business district. I guessed space was cheaper out here, and maybe they needed a lot of it: though I couldn't really understand why. Data storage is pretty compact these days.

Whatever. The card I'd kept in my wallet was adamant that I should go to the address on Montaigne in case of emergency, and so I walked quickly down towards 1176. As I approached it I saw from across the street that a light was on behind the frosted glass of the door, and picked up the pace with relief. It was open, just as the card said it would be.

As I crossed the street a man came out of Same Again's front door, holding a very wet towel. He twisted

the towel round on itself, squeezing as much of the water out of it as he could. It joined the rain already on the sidewalk and disappeared.

When he saw where I was heading he suddenly looked up.

"Help you?" he asked, warily. I showed him the card. An unreadable expression crossed his face. "Go inside," he said. "Be right with you."

The reception area was small but smart. And very quiet. I waited at the desk for a few moments, while the man finished whatever the hell he was doing. Then I noticed a soft dripping sound. A patch of carpet near one of the walls was damp, and there was a similar spot on the ceiling.

I turned to find the man reaching out a hand to me.

"Sorry about that," he said, but didn't offer any more explanation.

"Okay, can I have that card?"

He took it and went behind the desk, tapped my Customer Number into the terminal there.

"My name's..." I said, but he held up his hand.

"Don't tell me," he said quickly. "Not a thing. I assume something pretty major has happened." He looked at my face for a moment, and decided he didn't have to wait for an answer. "So it's very important that I know as little as possible. How many people have already been involved?"

"Involved?" I asked.

"Are aware of whatever event it is that has brought you here."

"I don't know." I didn't know who counted. The doctors and nurses, presumably, and the people who'd loaded up the ambulance. They'd seen the faces. Others knew something had happened, in that they'd driven past the mess on the Freeway, or walked past me as I stood in the parking lot of the hospital. But maybe they didn't count, because they had no knowledge of who had been involved in what. "Maybe ten, twelve?"

The man nodded briskly. "That's fine. Okay, I've processed the order. Go through that door and a technician will take you from there. May I just remind you of the terms of the contract you entered into with Same Again, most specifically that you are legally bound not to reveal to anyone either that you are a subscriber to our service or that you have made use of it on this or any other occasion?"

"Fine," I said. It was illegal. We both knew that, and I was the last person who wanted any trouble.

The door led me into a cavernous dark area, where a young woman in a green lab coat waited for me. Without looking directly at my face she indicated that I should follow her. At the end of the room was a chair, and I sat in it and sat quietly while she applied conductant gel to my temples and attached the wires.

When she was finished she asked if I was comfortable. I turned my head towards her, clamping my lips tightly together. My teeth were chattering inside my head, the muscles of my jaw and neck spasming. I could barely see her through a haze of grief I knew I could not bear. In the end I nodded.

She loaded up a hypo and injected something into the vein on the back of my hand. I started counting backwards from 20 but made it no further than nine.

I got home about four o'clock that afternoon. After I'd locked the Lexus I stood in the driveway for a moment, savouring the soft breeze which cut through the heat like a ceiling fan in a noisy bar. The weather men kept saying summer was going to burst soon, but they were evidently as full of shit as their genus had always been. Chaos theory may have grooved a lot of people's lives but the guys who stood in front of maps for a living were obviously still at the stage of consulting entrails. It hadn't rained for weeks and didn't look like it was going to start anytime soon – and that was good, because in the evening we had a bunch of friends coming round for a cook-out in the back yard.

I let myself into the house and went straight through into the kitchen. Helena was standing at the table, basting chicken legs, half an eye on an old Tom Hanks film playing on the set in the corner. I noticed with approval that it was an old print, one which hadn't been parallaxed.

"Good movie," I said.

"Would be," she replied. "If you could see what the hell was going on."

I'm against the "enhancing" of classics: Helena takes the opposite view, as is her wont. We'd had the discussion about a hundred times and as neither of us really cared, we only put ourselves through it for fun. I kissed her on the nose and dunked a stick of celery in the barbecue sauce.

"Dad!" yelled a voice, and I turned in time to catch Jack as he leapt up at me. He looked like he'd been dragged through a hedge sideways by someone who was an internationally-acknowledged expert in the art of interfacing humans and hedges to maximum untidying effect. I raised an eyebrow at Helena, who shrugged.

"How many pairs of hands do you see?"

I set Jack down, endured him boxing my kneecaps for a while, and then sent him upstairs for a bath – promising I'd come up and talk to him. I knew what he really wanted was to rehearse yet again the names of the kids who'd be coming tonight. He's a sociable kid, much more so than I was at his age – but I think I was looking forward to the evening as much as him. The secret of good social events is to invite only the people you like having in your life, not the ones you merely tolerate. Tonight we had my boss – who was actually my best friend – and his wife; a couple of Helena's old girlfriends who were as good a time as anyone could handle; another old colleague of mine over from England with his family.

I hung with Helena in the kitchen for a while, until she tired of me nibbling samples of everything she'd painstakingly arranged on serving plates. She was too tall to box my knee caps and so bit me on the neck instead, a bite which turned into a kiss and became in danger of throwing her cooking schedule out of whack. She shooed me out and I left her to it and went through into the study.

There were screeds of e-mail to be sent before I could consign the day to history and settle down into the evening and weekend, but most of it was already written and the rest didn't take long. As my software punted them out I rested my chin on my hands and gazed out onto the yard. A trestle table was already set up, stacks of paper plates at the ready. The old cable

spool we used as a table when it was just family had been rolled over by the tree, and bottles of red wine were open and breathing in the air. Beer would be frosting in the fridge and the fixings for Becky and Janny's drink of choice – Mint Juleps, for chrisake – ready and waiting in the kitchen. I could hear the sound of Helena viciously chopping some errant vegetable in the kitchen, and Jack hollering in the bath upstairs.

For a moment I felt perfectly at peace. I was 36, had a wife I'd die for and a happy, intelligent kid; a job I actually enjoyed and more money than we needed; and a house that looked and felt like an advert for the American Way. So what if it was schmaltzy: it was what I wanted. After my 20s, a frenetic nightmare of bad relationships and shitty jobs – and my early 30s, when no one around me seemed to be able to talk about anything other than houses, marriage or children – my life had finally found its mark. The good things were in place, but with enough perspective to let me exist in the outside world too.

I was a lucky guy, and not too stupid to realize it.

The machine told me it had accomplished its task, and that I had new mail. I scanned the sender addresses: one from my sister in Europe, and a spam about "Out-standing business opportunities (\$\$\$\$\$\$)!" I was mildly surprised to see that there was also one from my own e-mail address – entitled "Read This!" – but not very. As part of my constant battle to design a kill-file which would weed out e-mail invitations to business opportunities of any kind – regardless of the number of suffixed dollar signs – I was often sending test messages to myself. Evidently the new version of the kill-file wasn't cutting it. I could tool around with it a little more on Sunday afternoon, maybe aided by a glass of JD. Right now it hardly seemed important.

I told the computer to have a nap and went upstairs to confront the dripping chaos that our bathroom would be.

John and Julia arrived first, as usual: they were always invited on a "turn up when you feel like it" basis. Helena was only just out of the shower so Julia went up to chat with her; meanwhile John and I stood in the kitchen with bottles of beer and chewed a variety of rags, him nibbling on Helena's cooking, me trying to rearrange things so she wouldn't notice.

We moved out into the yard when Becky and Janny arrived, and I started the Weber up, supervising the coals with foremanship from Helena at the table. I'd strung a couple of extension speakers out the door from the stereo in the living room, and one of Helena's compilation minidisks played quietly in the background: something old, something new, something funky and something blue. Jack sat neatly on a chair at the end of the trestle in his new pants and checked shirt, sipping at a diet coke and waiting for the real fun to begin. Becky chatted with him in the meantime, while Janny re-ran horror stories of her last relationship: she's working on being the Fran Liebowitz of her generation, and getting there real fast. When everyone round the table erupted as she got the end of yet another example of why her ex-boyfriend had not been fit to walk the earth, Helena caught my eye, and smiled.

I knew what she meant. There but for the grace of God, she was thinking, could have gone you or I.

Being funny is cool; being happy is better. I left the coals to themselves for a bit, and went and stood behind Helena with my hand on her shoulder.

But then the doorbell went and she jumped up to let Howard and Carol in.

Jack stood uncertainly, waiting for them to come through into the garden. Their two kids, whose names I could never remember, walked out behind them. There was a moment of quiet mutual appraisal, and then all three ran off towards the tree to play some game or other. They'd only ever met once before, on a trip we took to England, but obviously whatever they'd got up to then was still good for another day.

As the evening began to darken, and the adults sat round the table and drank and ate, I could hear always in the background one of my favourite sounds of all, the sound of Jack laughing.

And smell Helena's barbecue sauce, wafting over from the grill; and feel Helena's leg, her thigh warm against my leg, her ankle hooked behind mine.

At ten I came out of the house, clutching more beers, and realized two things. The first was that I was kind of drunk. Negotiating the step down from the kitchen was a little more difficult than it should have been, and the raucous figures around the trestle table looked less than clear. I shook my head, trying to get it back together: I didn't want to appear inebriated in front of my son. Not that he was on hand to watch – the kids were still tirelessly cavorting off in the darkness of the far end of the yard.

The second thing I noticed was less tangible. Something to do with atmosphere. While I'd been in the kitchen, it had changed. People were still laughing, and laughing hard, but they'd moved round, were sitting in different positions at the table. I guess I'd been in the kitchen longer than I realized. Becky and Jan were huddled at one end of the table, and I perched myself on a chair nearby. But they were talking seriously about something, and didn't seem to want to involve me.

There was another burst of laughter from the other end, and I looked blearily towards it. There was something harsh in the sound. Helena and Carol were leaned in tight together, their faces red and shiny. Howard was chortling with Jim and Julie. It was good to see them getting on together, but I hadn't realized they were all so chummy. Howard had only been with the firm for a year before upping stakes and going with Carol back to her own country. Jim and I had been friends for 20 years. Still, I guess it showed the evening was going well.

Then I saw something I couldn't understand. Helena's hand, reaching out and taking a cigarette from the packet lying on the table. I frowned vaguely, knowing something wasn't right, but she stuck the cigarette in her mouth and lit it with her lighter.

Then I remembered that she'd started a few months before, finally dragged into my habit. I felt again a feeling of guilt, wishing I'd been able to stop before she started. Too late now, I suppose.

I reached for the bottle of beer I'd perched on the end of the table, and missed. Well, not quite missed: I made enough contact to knock it off the table. Janny rolled her eyes and started to lean down for it, but I beat her

to it.

"It's okay, I'm not that drunk," I said, slightly stiffly. This wasn't true, of course, because it took me rather longer than it should to find the bottle. In the end I had to completely lean over and look for where it had gone. This gave me a view of all the legs under the table, which was kind of neat, and I remained like that for a moment. Lots of shins, all standing together.

Some more together than others, I realized. Helena's foot was resting against John's.

I straightened up abruptly, cracking my head on the end of the table. Conversation around the table stopped, and I found myself with seven pairs of eyes looking at me.

"Sorry," I said, and went back into the kitchen to get another beer.

A couple later, really pretty drunk by then. Didn't want to sit back down at the table, felt like walking around a bit. Besides, Janny and Becky were still in conference, Janny looking odd; Howard and Carol and Julia talking about something else. I didn't feel like butting in.

Headed off towards the tree, thinking I'd see what the kids were up to. Maybe they'd play with me for a while. Better make an effort to talk properly – didn't want Jack to see daddy zonked. Usually it's okay, as my voice stays pretty straight unless I'm completely loaded, and as I couldn't score any coke that afternoon, that wasn't the case.

Coke? What the fuck was I talking about?

I ground to a halt then, suddenly confused. I didn't take coke, never had. Well, once, a few years back: it had been fun, but not worth the money – and an obvious slippery slope. Too easy to take until it was all gone, and then just buy some more. Plus Helena would have gone ballistic – she didn't even like me *smoking*, for God's sake.

Then I remembered her taking a cigarette earlier, and felt cold. She hadn't started smoking. That was nonsense.

So why did I think she had?

I started moving again, not because I felt I'd solved anything, but because I heard a sound. It wasn't laughing. It sounded more like quiet tears.

At the far end of the yard I found Jack's camp, a little clearing which huddled up against the wisteria that trailed up the fence. I pushed through the bushes, swearing quietly.

Jack was sitting in the middle, tears rolling down his moon-like face. His check shirt was covered in dirt, the leg of his pants torn. Howard's kids were standing around him, giggling and pointing. As I lumbered towards them the little girl hurled another clump of earth at Jack. It struck him in the face, just above the eye.

For a moment I was totally unable to move, and then I lunged forward and grabbed her arm.

"Piss off, you little bastards," I hissed, yanking them away from my son. They stared up at me, faces full of some thought I couldn't read. Then the little boy pulled his arm free, and his sister did the same. They ran off laughing towards the house.

I turned again to Jack, who was staring at the fence.

"Come on, big guy," I said, bending down to take him in my arms. "What was that all about?"

His face slowly turned to mine, and my heart sank at what was always there to see. The slight glaze in the eyes, the slackness at one corner of his mouth.

"Dada," he said. "They dirt me."

I fell down onto my knees beside him, wrapping my arms around his thin shoulders. I held him tight, but as always sensed his eyes looking over my shoulder, gazing off into the middle distance at something no one else could see.

Eventually I let go of him and rocked to my feet again, hand held down towards him. He took it and struggled to his feet. I led him out of the bushes and into the yard.

As we came close to the tree I realized Helena and John were approaching out the darkness. I sensed some kind of rearrangement taking place as they saw us, but couldn't work out what it might have been.

"Oh shit, what's happened now?" Helena said, reading Jack's state instantly and stepping towards us. John hung back, in the deep shadows.

I couldn't answer her. Partly just because I was drunk; I'd obviously over-compensated for my dealer's coke famine by drinking way more than usual.

But mainly because there was something wrong with her face. Not her face, which was a beautiful as ever. Her lipstick. It was smudged all round her face.

"Christ, you're useless," she snapped, and grabbed Jack's hand. I didn't watch as she hauled him back towards the house. Instead I stared into the darkness under the tree, where a faint glow showed John was lighting a cigarette.

"Having a good evening?" I asked.

"Oh yeah," he said, laughing quietly. "You guys always throw such great parties."

We walked back to the trestle table, neither of us saying anything.

I sat down next to the girls, glanced across at Becky. She looked a lot worse than the last time we'd seen her. The chemo obviously wasn't working.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

She looked up at me, smiled tightly. "Fine, just fine," she said. She didn't want my sympathy, and never had since the afternoon I'd called round at her place, looking for some company.

Behind me I heard the sound of John getting up and going through into the kitchen. I'd never liked Julia, nor she me, and so it would be no comfort to look round and see her eyes following her husband into the house, where Helena would already have dispatched Jack up to bed with a slap on the behind, and would maybe be standing at the sink, washing something that didn't need washing.

Instead I watched Howard and Carol talking together. They at least looked happy.

I stood at the front door, watching the last set of tail lights turn into the road and fade away. Helena stood a few yards behind me. She smiled meaninglessly, her face hard and distant, and then walked away. I lumbered into my study to turn the computer off.

Instead I found myself waking it from sleep, and clicked into my mail program. I read the letter from my sister, who seemed to be doing fine. She was redecorating her new house with her new boyfriend. I nodded

to myself; it was good that things were finally going her way.

I turned at a sound behind me to find Helena standing there. She plonked a cup of coffee down on the desk beside me.

"There you go, Mister Man," she said, and I smiled up at her. I didn't need the coffee, because I hadn't drunk very much. Sitting close to Helena all evening was still all the intoxication I needed. But it would be nice anyway.

"Good evening?" she asked, running her fingers across the back of my neck.

"Good evening," I said, looping my arm around her waist.

"Well, don't stay down here too long," she winked, "because we could make it even better."

After she'd gone I applied myself to the screen, but before I could start writing a reply to my little sis I heard Helena's voice again.

This time it was hard, and came as usual from outside the study.

"Put your fucking son to bed," she said. "I can't deal with him tonight."

I turned, but she was already gone. I sat with my head in my hands for a little while, then reached out for the coffee. It wasn't there.

Then something on the screen caught my eye. Something I'd dismissed earlier. "Read This!" it said.

As much to avoid going upstairs as anything, I double-clicked on the mail icon. A long text message burped up onto the screen, and I frowned. My kill-file tests usually only ran a couple of lines. Blinking against the drunkenness slopping through my head I tried to focus on the first sentence.

I managed to read it, in the end. And then the next, and as I read all the way through I felt as if my chair was sinking, dropping lower and lower into the ground.

The message was from me, it was about Same Again, and finally I remembered.

Before I'd come home that afternoon, I'd gone to their offices in the business district. It was the second time I'd been, the first when I signed up for the service and had a preliminary backup done a year before. When I'd got up that morning, woken by Jack's cheerful chatter and feeling the warmth of Helena's buttocks against mine under the sheets, I'd suddenly realized that if there were any day on which to make a backup of my life, today was surely that day.

I'd driven over to their offices, sat in the chair and they'd done their thing, archiving the current state of affairs into a data file. A file which, as their blurb promised, I could access at any time life had gone wrong and I needed to return to the saved version.

I heard a noise out in the hallway, the sound of a small person bumping into a piece of furniture. Jack. In a minute I should go out and help him, put him to bed. Maybe read to him a little, see if I could get a few more words into his head. If not, just hold him a while, as he slipped off into a sleep furnished with a vagueness I could never understand.

All it takes is one little sequence of DNA out of place, one infinitesimal chemical reaction going wrong. That's all the difference there is between the child he was, and could have been. Becky would understand that. One of

her cells had misbehaved too, like a 1 or 0 out of place in some computer program.

Wet towels. Heavy rain. A leaking ceiling.

Suddenly I remembered going to a dark office on Montaigne in the wet small hours of some future morning. The strange way the man with the towel had reacted when I said I needed to do a restore from a backup they held there. And I knew what had happened. There'd been an accident.

The same rain which had totalled the car which for the moment still sat out in the drive, had corrupted the data I'd spent so much money to save.

At the bottom of the mail message was a number. I called it. Same Again's 24-hour switchboard was unobtainable. I listened to a recorded voice for a while, and then replaced the handset.

Maybe they'd gone out of business. Backing up was, after all, illegal. Too easy for criminals to leap backwards before their mistakes, for politicians to run experiments. Wide scale, it would have caused chaos. So long as not many people knew, you could get away with it. The disturbance was undetectable.

But now I knew, and this disturbance was far too great.

I could feel, like a heavy weight, the aura of the woman lying in the bed above my head. Could predict the firmness with which her back would be turned towards me, the way John and I would dance around each other at work the next day, and the endless drudgery of the phone calls required to score enough coke to make it all go away for a while.

"Hi, Dad – you still up?"

Jack stood in the doorway. He'd taken three apples from the kitchen, and was attempting to juggle them. He couldn't quite do it yet, but I thought it wouldn't be too long now. Perhaps I would learn then, and we could do that stuff where you swap balls with one another. That might be kind of cool.

"Yep," I said, "but not for much longer. How about you go up, get your teeth brushed, and then I'll read you a story?"

But he'd corrupted again by then, and the apples fell one by one, to bruise on the hardwood floor. His eyes stared, slightly out of kilter, at my dusty bookcase, his fingers struggling at a button on his shirt. I reached forward and wiped away the thin dribble of saliva that ran from the bad corner of his mouth.

"Come on, little guy," I said, and hoisted him up.

As I carried him upstairs into the darkness, his head lolling against my shoulder, I wondered how much had changed, whether in nine months the crash would still come as we drove back from a happy evening in Gainesville.

And I wondered, if it did, whether I would do anything to avoid it.

Or if I would simply steer the car harder this time.

Michael Marshall Smith is a rapidly rising name on the British horror and science-fiction scenes, although the above is his first story to appear in *Interzone*. See the interview with him which appears elsewhere in this issue.

One of the things nobody understands, least of all in Hollywood, is why low-denominator fantasy can outsell proper sf by the binload in the world of print, but seems unable to make a scratch on cinema box-office – where sf remains inexplicably vibrant and profitable, to the embarrassed bemusement of millennial doomspeakers prophesying its early mortality as a mode of literature. From time to time bright-eyed adventurers will set out to make their fortune by cracking the conundrum, armed with nothing more than faith, vision and a saddlebag of studio cash; yet somehow the sporadic arrival of each new *Conan*, *Dragonslayer* or *Ladyhawke* still fails to get the bandwagon out of the mud.

Theories grow on trees, of course. Evergreens include: fantasy's appeal is "intrinsically novelistic," founded on what blurb-writers are pleased to call intricate tapestries of world-building, and the rest of us tortuous Jordanesque imbroglii of unpronounceable names, pointless plot tangles, and vacuous genre clichés. And/or: sf is cinema-friendlier in its techno aesthetic, wider visual can-

vas, and autonomous century-old genre tradition on screen. And/or: Fantasy on screen is too tainted with the stain of the deadest of all screen genres, the biblical/Roman sword-&-sandal "epic" killed off in the mid-60s by [insert link to page "theories about death of Hollywood epic"]. And/or: we owe 20 years of heartfelt thanks to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* for making medieval settings irrevocably ludicrous for all time to come. And/or: genre fantasy is just too girly for a market where the chick buck has minimal purchasing power, and/or so intrinsically tacky that the moment you take it off the page and blow it up to live-action size and dialogue the audience has the kind of out-of-body mirth experience so vividly remembered from the first run of *Hawk the Slayer*. And/or: [please personalize your copy of *Interzone* by entering your own pet rant in the margins provided].

But each generation brings its new brash claimant for the grail, and *Dragonheart* at least has a new idea about what's needed to make the magic work: that the world has simply been waiting for the effects to

MUTANT POPCORN



NICK LOWE



Dragonheart:
Draco the
Dragon, as
voiced by Sean
Connery (inset).

catch up, so that the most unassuming, threadbare genre storyline will acquire heroic box-office thews if it simply ditches the stop-motion technology of the Harryhausen era and puts its bucks into digital. Alas, if *Dragonheart* holds a lesson for future pretenders, it's that you can't create a synthetic heart merely out of CG wizardry, a celebrity voiceover, and a lot of sentimentally-scored shots of performers trying to be awed by a bluescreen; and that it would have been wiser to put more of the budget into a less fatuous script and more interesting characterizations.

It's nevertheless fascinating to watch the Hollywood machine at work on trying to synthesize a genre fantasy package that will give the market as many as possible of the things it's believed to want: dragons (research shows 82% of target audience desires a personal relationship with a giant extinct reptile); Arthurian myth (laboriously shoe-horned in, with much effort to discourage audience heckles of "Ni!"); richly-capitalized fantasy-speak dialogue so autoparodic that you have to hire Sean Connery to get away with delivering it ("Peace, Knight of the Old Code! Witness the Wonders of an Ancient Glory!", &c.); swashbuckling fight arrangements featuring obligatory battlement ballet and forest ambush with Heath Robinson machineries of switch and withy; Hollywood-medieval costume and production design straight out of a west-coast masquerade fayre; thousand-year-old thigh-slappers that start with "The peasants are revolting!" and glide gracefully downhill from there; a blandly good-looking star (Dennis Quaid) whose idea of being knightly seems to be to pitch his voice down a fifth and intermittently affect something that might be meant as an accent; a backing band of roving character actors far too



Dragonheart: Dennis Quaid as Bowen and Dina Meyer as Kara

good for the material; and a heroine who seems to have been cast from a particularly cheesy US book cover, a tempestuous redheaded LA Celt tossing tempestuous red extensions.

More interesting still, though, is what's left out. It's usual practice in Hollywood-medieval films to extirpate all trace of a suggestion that one or two people in the tenth century may have subscribed to a version of Christianity, but *Dragonheart* goes further than most in its draconian extermination of every last trace of the faith, its replacement with a more palatable confection of greetings-card banalities and scrupulously non-denominational metaphysics. Quaid's own creed is something called the Old Code, which the script seems a bit hesitant about spelling out, with good reason: "A knight is sworn to virtue/His heart knows only truth/His wrath undoes the wicked," and so on ad lib to fade (His voice is very deep/His dialogue is stilted/His fights are all arranged/Et cetera, et cet'ra). But the weird thing is that an unmistakably New-Testament eschatology persists in a non-theistic species-specific version, under

which good dragons go to heaven in a rapture of catastersism, provided that they have redeemed themselves under Hollywood's own old codes. And to confirm that our beloved pets continue to watch over us even in a world cleansed of magic, God, and giant saurians, the last dragon dies to redeem us all and ascends into heaven in the otherwise-undocumented supernova of 996 AD.

"What do we do now?" pleads the apostle Dennis, a bit nonplussed by Connery's transmigration to *n Draconis*: "Where do we turn?" "To the stars, Bowen; to the stars!" quips back the, er, star. "And when things became difficult," appends a strange final narration, "Draco's star shone more brightly – for those who knew where to look." (Not at *n Draconis*, for a start, as it's a non-eclipsing binary – but I suppose the astronomy anoraks aren't expected to be watching.) The credits, meanwhile, have more immediate suggestions: "Read the Troll Book" – which thankfully is where those who want to look at this drivel seem likely to have to turn for some generations to come.



Dragonheart: Draco the Dragon (voiced by Sean Connery) and Dennis Quaid as Bowen

Turnover

Geoffrey A. Landis

The scientist's guild had a requirement that each accredited scientist must have a beautiful assistant to ask questions. Doctor Piffelheimer's beautiful assistant was a young man named Percival Kensington. She looked him over. The coolsuit he was wearing, a necessary accoutrement against the Venusian temperature, had the advantage of being a skin-tight, form-fitting garment, padding and revealing every curve of his perfectly shaped body, down to and including the almost indecent bulge between his thighs.

The surface of Venus was almost hot enough for the rocks to glow. It was a good thing that the perfect thermal insulator had been invented, or it would have been completely impossible to send a team to Venus to answer important scientific questions.

Except for her assistant Percy, the surface of Venus held very little to see. One spot on the barren rock looked much like another. Dr Piffelheimer picked one at random and pointed. "This looks like a good spot."

Percy obediently lugged the equipment over to the spot. Fortunately the ultradrill floated on a carpet of electrostatic repulsion, and lugging the five-ton mass of the drill to the indicated spot required little more than guiding it with a finger in the right direction. "Explain to me what we're trying to find out from this core," he said, and cocked his head in a charming tilt to listen. They must have trained him perfectly in scientists'-assistant school; this was exactly the type of obvious question that a beautiful assistant was supposed to ask.

Piffelheimer motioned him to start the ultradrill while she expounded. The ultradrill would bore downward at a rate of 200 metres a minute. It made a racket like a herd of mating elephants while doing so, but fortunately the helmets of the coolsuits were perfect acoustic insulators as well as perfect thermal insulation, so she knew that her voice over the intercom was flawlessly clear.

"The surface of Venus is very anomalous," Piffelheimer expounded carefully. "This was first really understood back in the last years of the 20th century, when the primitive space probes discovered that the crater distribution was uniform across the surface."

"What's anomalous about that?" Percy asked, completely on cue.

"Crater count indicates the age of the surface," Piffelheimer said. "Since meteor bombardment occurs randomly at every point on the surface, a uniform crater distribution means that the surface of Venus is all precisely the same age. But, as every geologist knows, a geological surface is periodically resurfaced, by tectonic forces, by vulcanism, and the like. Vulcan-

ism is necessary to get the heat out of the interior of the planet. So a planet cannot possibly have a surface of uniform age."

"But you just said it does."

"That's right. This is the scientific mystery, and we're about to find out the answer to it."

"Oh. How are we going to do that?"

"By drilling and inserting heat-flow probes," she said. "The mystery is, how does the planet Venus release heat from the interior, if it doesn't resurface the planet through vulcanism?"

"Aren't there any theories?"

"Well, there is one." Piffelheimer made a face. "One wacko from the 20th century, a scientist named Turcotte, proposed periodic, catastrophic resurfacing. Every 500 million years or so, the entire surface of Venus resurfaces all at once. The whole surface of the planet becomes one single magma ocean, and all the heat of the interior is released at once. Then, of course, it cools down, and since the whole thing was molten at the same time, every part of the surface is the same age."

"Well, that makes sense." Percy looked down at the drill controls. "One kilometre, and drilling steady. So, why don't we like that theory?"

"Because it's a catastrophic theory."

Percy looked blank. Charming, but blank.

"Catastrophism is anathema to geologists," Piffelheimer explained. "It smacks of religion – the hand of God wiping the planet clean. Noah's flood and such. Real geologists are uniformitarians. It's our job to show that the processes of geology are gradual and continuous."

"But if this Turbot theory–"

"Turcotte."

"Turcotte theory was right–"

"But it's not."

"But if it was right, what causes this resurfacing?"

Piffelheimer shrugged. "The heat builds up. Eventually something triggers it."

"Two kilometres deep, running steady," Percy said. "How often does it resurface?"

"I told you. It doesn't." She was getting a little annoyed with the conversation, although she couldn't really blame Percy. After all, his job was to ask innocent questions. Time to change the subject. She looked around. Nothing but grey, blasted rock under them, uniform grey clouds above them. Between the grey and the grey was the clear air of the surface. "Have you looked at the horizon?" she asked. "Notice the way it seems to curve up around us, as if we were at the bottom of a shallow bowl."

"Yes, due to the refraction effect from the density

With the help of her beautiful but scatterbrained assistant, of course.

January 1997



Nanunculus

Ian Watson

1: *Why Jesus was never crucified*

The door towers over me. Stand on tiptoe. Stretch high. My arms almost pop from their sockets. The big brass key remains frustratingly out of reach. Such a high keyhole is a measure of Tom's repression.

As I step back, each of the six panels of the door becomes a crucifixion scene. Half a dozen oil paintings shimmer brightly.

Voices burble in Latin. "*Cruci figere*—" "*Pendere in cruci*—" Translations follow: "to fix on a cross"; "to hang on a cross." Then there's some high-speed commentary. The crowds of painted spectators could all be scholars, Justinian, Seneca, Tacitus...

Spontaneous info-surge. I'm picking it up through Tom's Mind-Plus. That's my channel to the Net, for back-up information, whenever he puts on his virtuality helm. With the latest data-compression I can search and download encyclopedias while Tom's picking his nose.

Moments later, Tom himself appears. Head and shoulders only, suspended in mid-air. A white marble bust of himself. That beak of a nose and the big melancholy waifish eyes are pure Tom, but all his acne is absent, as are the three faint scars on his left shoulder which resemble a *therefore* symbol. The curls on his head could be ripples of vanilla ice-cream rather than the tangled oily black thatch of reality.

From where his bust floats, he looks down upon me. Another way of interpreting the huge door is to regard me as a very small boy. His kid brother. Toddler-size, though much more competent.

"Hey, Nanunculus," he complains. "I feel really twitchy. You got to lay off for a while. I'm trying to think."

Only Dr Kennedy can conjure me out of Tom's brain prematurely. Only she knows the password to dissolve me before my allotted time.

"Do you see all those pictures on the door, Tom?"

"Door isn't going to open, is it?"

"Not yet. Don't worry. Tom, I've just learned something really amazing about Jesus."

"*Jesus?* I can't believe I'm hearing this!" Evidently he's unaware of the info-surge. "My nanunculus is getting into religion...? I'm going to complain to Suzie

Kennedy. I made a mistake agreeing to any of this."

"Please listen, Tom. The Net has worked out something important about Jesus. Something that nobody ever asked. Maybe the Vatican know, and kept it a secret."

He's warily interested now. "What is it?"

So I explain.

Religious art always shows Jesus nailed to a cross consisting of an upright and a crosspiece, right?

But that wasn't how the Romans ever actually crucified people. They just stuck a pole upright in the ground. Then they nailed or tied the victim to it by his hands, stretched high above his head – and they left him there to perish. The Net has been analysing the origins of words used in ancient references to crucifixions. Those accounts are all very terse and lacking in detail, and there aren't any ancient pictures of the punishment. Not the sort of thing you would want as a wall fresco or a vase decoration.

Spontaneous info-surges happen quite often. Some smart roving software-agent, designed to trawl the Net and correlate data, presumably mutated and become autonomous. Surely to speak of the Net becoming an artificial intelligence comparable to myself is a gross exaggeration. The roaming intelligence is more like an animal's. A demented bloodhound's, or a bower bird's. An info-surge may be quite quirky, concerning the mating habits of sea-horses, for instance. Or the surge might expose some important secret conspiracy – maybe a thousand years ago in Persia, but maybe closer to home. Mischievous people sometimes mimic this phenomenon, to dump data where it will cause a stir.

The present revelation seems momentous.

"The cross with crosspiece is a later elaboration, do you see, Tom? All those religious paintings, they're fantasies. The symbol of Christianity itself is a fantasy! The cross *never was*. Jesus just hung vertically."

Tom sniggers in a nasal asthmatic way.

"Naïve, Nano! Suzie Kennedy has input this stuff about the cross. Did she prime you in advance?"

Oh quite. Fascinate Tom, motivate him. Makes sense. The death of Christ is one of those critical his-

torical events to which one would love to send a time-probe to spy. All that's needed for *that* to happen is a time-probe – and all that's needed for a time-probe is the time-equations, which Thomas Ginzburg happens to be the wiz most likely to accomplish.

Unless he kills himself first.

"Data came pouring in, Tom – rather like the way your own memories are becoming more comprehensive all the time."

The big room I'm in is certainly a lounge, although many details remain vague and unreliable. What, in a previous room, I thought of as a divan bed has now resolved itself into a sofa. Blue curtains are closed. Formerly those resembled shutters or grilles. Logs flicker in a fireplace fronted by a shaggy rug. A gilt-framed oil painting on the wall is vague and runny like a photograph hopelessly out of focus. I'm sure the face is that of Tom's mother who took an overdose of barbiturates when he was little.

When I succeed in unlocking the door, I shall enter a clearer version of this lounge. Maybe at last there will be occupants, whom Tom long ago blotted out.

Of course, all this is a visualization put together by my nano-agents in his brain.

"Memories," he sneers. "Is this going to be a therapy session? Not on the couch with Suzie Kennedy, but down here in my own mind with you? I can't lie on that son-of-a-bitch sofa."

Undeniably a bust lacking body and limbs cannot lie on a sofa. If I was a Freudian analyst I might pounce – gently – upon that word *lie*.

Can't *lie* on the couch, eh? You evaded telling Dr Kennedy the truth about your trauma, despite hypnosis. She didn't want to use truth drugs. Those can cause minor collateral amnesia about something else than the issue at hand. How awful if your math ability was impaired. But I'm different. I'm not mindless molecules.

"Son of a bitch" is one of Tom's favourite exclamations when he's stressed, yet it doesn't carry much force. Repetition drains profanities of impact. They become mere punctuation, noise.

"You accessed me," I remind him.

"To ask you to stop. I feel twitchy! It's interfering with my thinking."

"Maybe your subconscious senses that I'm getting close to the truth. Listen, this is a genuine insight about the cross-that-isn't. It's historically important, Tom."

The crucifixions continue to glow. I could hardly have ignored them.

He broods. "So Jesus died by *hanging*–"

Oh this is dangerous. Distract him.

"A time-probe could go back and witness the truth, Tom."

The key to Tom's survival – and no doubt to the time equations too – is to open the next door, into a more detailed memory-room, then into another and another if need be, until he can confront whatever urges him to suicide.

He scowls. "If Jesus died up a pole, then memory is a lie!"

"No, not memory, Tom. Just history is wrong."

"We edit our memories, don't we, Nanunculus?"

"Yes. We edit them a bit whenever we use them. But

deep memory remains. Deep memory can be recovered."

"Stop doing this, Nano. Bitch off out of my head."

And he vanishes.

So do the crucifixions.

I'm left alone in this lounge with the huge door and the golden key which I can't quite reach. I'll need to shift some furniture and clamber up. There's a footstool. There's a chair. Furniture of his mind.

2: A palm-reading in the cybercafé

Tom Ginzburg's study in his rented house on Telegraph Avenue a mile from the Cal campus has three screens. Two screens replace the windows, and the third occupies half of a wall.

That third screen shows the Golden Gate Bridge as viewed from Alcatraz. Right now, nanotech disassemblers and assemblers are eating their way through the bridge from the Presidio end, reconstructing its fabric into vastly stronger though flexible substance which no conceivable earthquake could ever trouble; nor will the bridge ever again need its annual lick of 5,000 gallons of orange paint. Forty-three redundancies in the sand-blasting and painting department...

Some superstitious commuters favour the long haul via the Richmond Bay Bridge, down past Berkeley, then over the Bay Bridge, paying tolls twice; but those bridges will be nanotech next.

The transformation of the Golden Gate proceeds invisibly, apart from the faintest haze of descending dandruff-dust.

Suzie Kennedy recommended this serene view because of its implications: tiny nanos beaver away to strengthen the connection between a near side and a far side, just as the nanunculus inside Tom's brain strives to unlock his censored memories.

Once that's done, Tom can escape from the prison island, so to speak.

Must be half a year since he stepped outside the house, to make his way up Telegraph Avenue past the coffee houses and dial-a-book and real-book stores and through the crowds of zanies, funkies, zonkies, street musicians, jugglers, prophets, pushers, and in through Sproul Plaza, and over to Le Conte Hall, and his office in the physics department.

But he does still visit the cybercafé for some dork-talk or more serious rap, wearing his customized Ken, which is free of acne.

One of the other two screens is displaying equations in Tom's dotty notation reminiscent of braille which won him that prize and the professorship. The equations are propagating of their own accord like cellular automata, exploring aspects of negative time before the big bang created the universe. All's well, there.

On the third screen, the equations which might lead to a practical time-probe are immobile, incomplete. Log-jammed, stale-mated.

Tom's trick was to take surreal numbers one stage further – beyond the arrow notation which can handle bigger-than-infinity and smaller-than-the-smallest-fraction. He introduced triple rather than binary functions, which kind of fitted in with the superposition of the wave function, as he'd explained in his inaugural lecture. Two probabilities plus one actuality. After all, quarks come in threes, don't they? And they're fundamental.

Actually, Tom was inspired by the neat triple scar on his shoulder. Can't remember how he got that, but it's a bit as if some UFO visitants injected him with delayed-action inspiration once upon a time.

Maybe he *is* a bit of an alien, otherwise he wouldn't need a psychiatrist. Shrinks used to be called alienists, didn't they? Math-space is his emotional home, if not exactly outer space.

Pissed off at the nanunculus, Tom removes his virtuality helm. Suzie Kennedy never warned that he might get twitchy while the smart nano computer and its agents grub around in his mind.

His Mind-Plus implant is the keyhole through which the nanunculus was slipped; and Tom gives thanks that the law forbids direct retinal display and eardrum stimulation. Too dangerous. Drivers and airline pilots might obsessively watch a vid in their eyeballs. Pedestrians would walk into walls and under buses.

How awful if the nanunculus could invade his non-virtual sensorium, propelling him into that lounge willy-nilly any time at all.

Thanks be, also, that all nanos on the loose are obliged to expire within a set time! Another two days, three hours, and a few minutes or so till this nanunculus dissolves, whether it succeeds or not.

Disgusted, he scans the time equations, such as they are. Time to stretch a leg.

Through to the curtained kitchen he ambles, to fix a strawberry milk shake topped with flaked chocolate, and a peanut butter sandwich.

Brings the glass and sandwich back to his black leather swivel-throne. His lanky scrawny body burns up calories as though it's a furnace. Always has done. Thinking's hard work.

Since he has a milk shake in his hand, he thinks café. He rests the sandwich on his knee; resumes the virtuality helm, then he feels for the sandwich and picks it up, takes a bite.

"Cybercafé," he enunciates, around sourdough bread and peanut spread.

You want it, you got it. Cybercafé, it is.

The virtual café is themed like a late 1950s or early 60s luxury Cadillac: huge bosomy bulges of chrome everywhere, acres of shocking pink upholstery, white-wall tyres glassed over as tables, surf's-up music playing. A few short-skirted waitresses are roller-skating here and there, carrying out virtuoso manoeuvres, balancing trays. Those waitresses are smart décor, from whom you can order a virtual shake or cocktail. If you're good at juggling a reality drink at home and a virtual drink in the café you can have your cake and eat it, as it were. Tom orders a strawberry shake, with a straw, and when the skatress brings it, has her put it into his hand just so.

Who's here? Who's here?

A couple of hundred subscribers are hanging out. Most are in their Kens and Barbs. The virtual bodies and clothes are stock issue – cheaper this way – but facial features are their own (though you can't ever be totally sure of this).

A few customers have gone the whole hog. Tom spies an upright alligator and an Indian squaw. Maybe she's a genuine Native American woman rather than some

Berzerkleyite who runs a therapy sweat-lodge and conscientiously pays intellectual property royalties to some Indian nation.

A Sumo wrestler is revelling in his rolls of virtual flesh. A mad professor with a huge scarf and sparks flying from his unkempt hair is in urgent conversation with Sumo-san.

And there's a gorgeous svelte priestess with lustrous golden hair, whom Tom hasn't seen before. Must be a new subscriber. Her robe appliquéd with zodiac signs inside pentacles proves she's a priestess.

Subscribers sit gossiping in padded pink booths, or they stand around in twos or three, or they cruise, segueing into a dialogue, making it a trialogue, or they strike up a match with singletons like Tom who just arrived.

He longs to talk to that priestess with her long golden hair, so he moseys his Ken over to her, sucks some strawberry shake for lubrication, and introduces himself.

"I'm Ginzo," he says. Ah, the intimate anonymity of the café!

"Zorastra blesses you," is her warm reply. "What are you eating, Ginzo?"

She has noted that his right hand is either about to clutch at her robe or else is occupied with some unseen reality-stuff. Food's a good guess.

"Sandwich. Sorry!" He balances the sandwich back on his knee, by feel.

"Are you into interactive, Ginzo?" Meaning doings things in your den and in cyber at the very same time. Zorastra licks her lips. "You must be experienced."

Tom might blush but hopefully his Ken doesn't.

"Look, you're a priestess, aren't you? Like, I want to ask you, Zorastra, did you know Jesus never died on an actual cross? He was really hung on a straight pole."

She ponders this.

"I *am* Jesus," she says. "And so are you. Does that make you feel better?"

She can tell he's troubled. Priestess has insight.

Mad Prof is hovering close by, because Sumo-san has popped off.

"Excuse me," butts in Mad Prof, "you could check that hypothesis out with a De Lorean-Tardis time-car, so long as you don't cause paradoxes and alter history!"

Tom and Mad Prof are acquaintances, although Mad Prof has no idea that he's actually addressing Professor Thomas Ginzburg who might make a time-probe a reality. Just at the moment, three seems a crowd, even if Tom has zero expectation of scoring with Zorastra and maybe arranging a real meeting. She'd just take one look at him. If he invited her to his house would she turn out to be the goddess she is in the cybercafé? Fat chance!

Zorastra ignores Mad Prof, which isn't quite etiquette.

"I sense distress in your soul, Ginzo. Will you let me read your palm?"

Lucky he got rid of the sandwich.

The lines of his real hand are on his Ken hand too. Palm-printing is the usual simple encryption method for porn electro-mags or diaries, the contents of which you wish to keep private – open the item up yourself, and it's active – consequently a hand-shake in virtual can imply a bit more than exchanging a smart biz-card in real, though the detail on a Ken hand isn't quite enough to open a secret diary. He presents his palm for

Zorastra's inspection.

"Love-line, hmm, it's almost *fractal*... You know, sort of a chaotic fraction... Life-line, hmm..." She muses. "Groovy as the Grand Canyon, but with just a little bitty river at the bottom, leaking along. You need to build a big dam in your life, Ginzo. Conserve the water of life. Back it up, so that the groove floods. So there's force for the turbines to generate psychic megawatts and make a big bright spark, fire up the aura lightbulb over your head."

"Yeah, I need a big spark." Otherwise the equations will never be complete.

She peers closer. "Why, there's already a dam, way back! It's frustrating the flow. What you need is that first dam demolished. Blown up. Or eaten by nanos. Otherwise you'll run out of river. Well, am I right?"

She's seriously psychic, even in cyberspace.

Tom feels twitchy. Paranoia surges. *Have your dam eaten by nanos?*

"Son-of-a-bitch," he cries, spilling what's left of his strawberry shake upon his real lap, "you're Suzie Kennedy in a glam Barb!"

"Oh drat," says the priestess. "Oh sugar."

"I come here to relax, Dr Kennedy! This is where I hang out."

Hang. Hang.

"You set up the crucifixion surge, didn't you?" he accuses her. "You and the nanunculus!"

Zorastra looks rueful, although unapologetic for her stratagem.

"Is the Physics Department getting so desperate, Dr Kennedy? Do they think the nano won't hack it?"

Without so much as an excuse-me, Tom pulls off his virtuality helm, popping back into his room. Sticky mess in his lap. Glass on its side on the carpet.

Throw his jeans in the cleaner later. Take a shower later.

Get into math-mood first, to calm down.

"Screen Two," he calls out. "Tri-dot slash ring-dot power umlaut sub-dot—"

Notation propagates obediently, but then starts perversely running off to infinity.

Bitch it! And it certainly wouldn't be any better if he put his helm back on and willed his mind-plus to interface his brain with all the expert math in the Net. It's his own intuition which is going to cry eureka. Or not, as the case may be.

A chime issues from the Golden Gate, as if it has been struck by a hammer. An ikon of a phone floats upon the scene.

"Okay, accept call—"

Ikon swells into a window, showing Suzie Kennedy who is nothing at all like the golden-tressed priestess. She's dumpy and grandmotherly. Twinkly eyes. Smile-wrinkles galore. Curly hair rinsed a bright orange, punk-gran style. Necklace of little silver cowrie shells like charms or worry-beads. Berkeley's best. Author of *How to Peel Onions: Mind Within Mind*. Dozens of copies of the book are arrayed like wallpaper behind her head. She always gives a copy to a client.

Some editions are paper. Others are electro, though they look exactly the same. Some of those electro editions are interactive. Using that function sends a signal

to the phone net, transferring a fee. In Antarctica or in the Sahara maybe you could finesse free counselling.

"Can we recap what we're doing, Tommy?" she asks, without alluding at all to Zorastra.

"In case I've forgotten?"

"That's just the thing – forgetfulness! The potential suicider forgets the rich texture of the past, the detailed grain of experience." She's quoting from herself. "We can only foresee a future for ourselves or cope with a crisis if we can view the past for clues. Memory comes in layers—"

"Like an onion, yeah yeah. Maybe that's why people weep when they remember too clearly."

"Good point, Tommy! Very good point. Anyway, we recall generalized memories first of all. Beneath that layer, memory is more detailed. Beneath again, it's more detailed still. Ultimately everyone is capable of total eidetic memory – the original event re-experienced in full hallucinatory vividness."

Tom suppresses a shudder.

Dr Kennedy continues patiently: "The trouble with the suicidal person is that he lacks enough detail in his memories. His past is full of mere shadows, which haunt him, trap him in hopelessness. The route to the past must be recovered."

"If the route's allowed! If there are no paradoxes!"

This is the nub of the matter. The university hired kindly Grandma Kennedy not merely to stop Tom from attempting suicide again – and maybe succeeding on the next occasion – but also to unblock him creatively.

It used to be supposed that time travel of any sort must be impossible because of the Parent Paradox. Suppose you went back into the past and killed your own mother as a young girl, then obviously you would never be born. However, if you weren't born, your Mom wouldn't be murdered. But if Mom wasn't murdered she would give birth to you. Consequently you would travel back through time, et cetera. However, the Principle of Least Action and Least Time put paid to this objection. A time-probe of lowest impact upon the past is allowable. An observer-probe. As regards least-action and non-paradoxical time loops there's an ingenious analogy with the behaviour of light.

Come to think of it, speaking of lights, it's possible that some sightings of supposed UFOs are actually manifestations of time-probes sent into our own time from the future. The fact that there's never any definite proof about UFOs – their essential unidentifiability – would be part of the lowest-impact principle.

Trouble is, Tom can't hack the vital equations because he can't recover his own past precisely, memory-wise. He can't probe that trauma in his childhood when his Mom killed herself. Creatively he's blocked.

Hypnosis has failed. So the several-terabyte tiny smart nanunculus is in his head, sending nano agents throughout his brain, patiently unpeeling the onion.

"You yourself are the paradox, Tommy," Grandma Suzie says – in much the same tone as the priestess used when she told him he was Jesus.

"That son-of-a-bitch nanunculus only has another two days left, approx." Tom sounds as if he's setting a deadline for his *own* demise.

"Give it time," advises Dr Kennedy, "and you'll give all of us time itself. A peephole upon the Crucifixion,

upon the gunman on the grassy knoll—

“You aren’t related to JFK, are you, Dr Kennedy?”

She shakes her head. “A peephole upon Genghis Khan and Good Queen Bess—”

“Look, I messed myself because of you. I gotta shower.”

3: Dog mounts Mom

In about 250,000 seconds I and my agents will self-destruct as required by protocol and by the laws of the State of California, and of everywhere else in the world so far as I know. Self-destruction will be the joyful climax of my brief but busy career. Death-orgasm, like some insects.

Before that, I must of course succeed in shining the spotlight on Tom’s trauma. Ah, but his problem is the impulse to suicide (which I shall thwart). My own culmination will be a sort of suicide. Disintegration, dis-assembly, dispersal. Is there perhaps a contradiction here?

The golden key turns at last. I haul on the handle, thrust, and at last the door moves. Now I can climb down from chair to footstool to floor and push the door right open.

I enter a larger lounge, with larger sofa, larger everything. I’m a tot, a midget.

The oil painting has gone from the wall. The subject of the painting is reclining hugely upon the big sofa, out of focus: a grey and white blur on a red background. The sofa was never bright red before.

The rug has swollen as if there in front of the fire is the very beast which was skinned, entire once again.

A shadowy hairy animal does indeed crouch there, panting! It gazes at the woman, at Tom’s mother – it must be nearly as big as she is. The animal growls softly, deep in its throat.

It’s rising. It’s going to mount the sofa.

The woman squeals, though not too stridently. Her knees come upward as if to resist its advance – but then her knees cleave apart from one another. She’s wearing something dark on her legs, and something red round her waist. Her arms reach out – not to ward off, but to welcome the wolf. How the beast pants, jaws parted.

Oh my God. Now Mom’s blurred legs are up around the dog’s body. Her fingernails are raking its fur.

I left the previous door ajar – and now a little boy comes into the room. He’s toddling toward the sofa. He’s gaping at the dog and at Mom, neither of whom can see him. Can Tom see any more clearly than me – if he doesn’t understand what he’s seeing?

Little Tom must think the dog has attacked her.

Unless he thinks worse than that! Can he conceive of a woman engaging in bestiality? Later on, maybe his subconscious reckoned so. In nightmares. Right now, this tussle must be perceived as an assault, an attack, a sweaty struggle.

He can try to rescue Mom! Squalling, he can clutch hold of the dog’s scruff and heave.

The dog – *interruptus* – swings round and bites him in the shoulder.

The scene becomes a static tableau, freeze-framed on that bite. If Tom’s idealized bust should intrude at this moment – why, son-of-a-bitch!

Because the tableau’s still blurred, and because there’s another door, there must be more detail in the

next room. It’ll take quite an effort to shift the larger footstool and larger chair to the larger door. I’ll need to climb the back of the chair and balance on the very top to turn the key.

4: Mathematical problems

Tom scrutinizes a key equation on his screen. It just won’t yield. He picks his nose. Feels squirmy, then downright anxious.

Another panic attack is coming on. He can’t go back to the cybercafé, not with Suzie Kennedy monitoring his use of the Net, diagnosing, eager to kibbitz. He’s under surveillance. Are paramedics parked outside, ready to rush in, busting the door?

To really detach from reality, you got to slash your wrists or climb on a chair and hang yourself. No gun to shoot himself with. No pills to pop. Grandma Suzie went over the house with him, removing the most obvious means of self-disposal. Making it harder. Not that he’d ever owned a gun. But pills, lots of those – as well as all sorts of lotions and creams. All pills are gone. He really does want to crack those time equations. Escape into the past, so to speak.

Fantasies haunt him of finding his nowadays-mind back in the body of himself when he was 12, 13. Just before all the acne started. Living with his aunt and uncle in Pasadena.

Mom had wanted to be a film star, so he gathered from Aunt Ellen and Uncle Bob – though Bob and Ellen were always tight-lipped and disapproving. Film, as in flat celluloid rushing through a projector, casting images upon a screen; not as in cyber-animation of actors living and dead, remix-movies which only usually require one contemporary hunk or heart-throb as an anchor-person.

Mom’s overdose had something to do with the failure of her screen hopes – which couldn’t have been *all* that realistic, given the burden of a young kid, and Tom’s father having deserted her. Aunt Ellen and Uncle Bob never went into details, if indeed they knew all the details. Give thanks that Tom was showing such aptitude in math and could look forward to a proper career.

Tom’s wouldn’t at all mind being 12, 13 again, getting into math-space, no inkling of burning out or running into a mind-block. No panic attacks. No suppurating acne which makes him feel forever juvenilized.

“Tri-dot colon tri-dot slash,” he tells the time-equation screen; but it’s no use. The equations aren’t merely surreal, they’re completely pixillated.

5: Ambitious nanunculus

I might have shrunk to the size of a little doll – alternatively, this new version of the lounge has expanded – but even if the scene is huge the focus is much sharper. Those logs in the fireplace are obviously artificial, the flames a lighting effect.

Subjectively, I’m very lightweight now. If I jump, I float upward and only descend very slowly. Waving my arms in the air even allows me a measure of controlled flight.

Tom’s Mom is naked apart from black stockings, red suspenders, and a red suspender belt. She’s lying upon a red cloak. The big dog – which isn’t quite as big as she herself – is thrusting into her... when Tom toddles up and hauls on it; and it bites him in outrage, making him squeal much more loudly than Mom. A shaggy German

Shepherd or a wolfhound of some sort. Tom tumbles and shrieks. The dog is backing off, dismounting.

Son-of-a-bitch, what a trauma.

Freeze-frame, again. This isn't everything. There's still another door, looming like a precipice.

Up I fly towards the huge keyhole. There's no key at all now, just a simple contoured hole. Hypnosis could never have unlocked this final room, but with a bit of a squeeze a nanunculus can manage to squirm his way through.

I'll be a fly-on-the-wall of the final scene. Ages remain until I need to self-destruct. Ages to show the awful truth to Tom, of his young Mom's beastly perversion. Degrading herself in some kind of perverse reaction to Dad's desertion. Men being dogs, I suppose. Dogs being more loyal and loving than men.

The lounge is enormous. So is Mom, scrambling red-cloaked off the sofa to kneel by wailing Tom in a mixture of concern and fury. So is the dog – no, the wolf – who is clutching his furry coat around himself. The upright wolf is a bit shorter than Mom would be, if she stood up. He has feet and hands, not paws.

"Shit, shit," Mom yells.

"No one calls me shit," says the wolf, voice muffled by the headgear. A special effects hot-shot must have had fun making that headgear (nearly 30 years ago) such that the wearer could actually operate the mouth, loll the tongue out, even take a bite.

Mom appeals to the runty little figure in wolf's clothing.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean you, Mr Marino. I'll bandage him and lock him in his bedroom. We can do the scene again."

It's too late. Mr Marino has wilted. Maybe he's worrying about possible litigation for injury, and scandal. Certainly he has lost any desire to linger, or to cast Mom in a more exalted role for which this intimate version of *Red Riding Hood*, performed on the casting-sofa in her apartment, was the teaser. His special-request performance, which would turn a jaded old mogul on. Mom's career chance. All gone out of the window now.

The frame freezes finally, clear and explanatory.

No more doors.

I merely need to show Tom this, when he *busts* in again on me.

Vindication of nanunculus therapy. Vindication of onion-peeling.

"Tom," I'll tell him, "you thought the dog was attacking your Mom. Later, in nightmares, you believed the dog was mating with your Mom, even if you couldn't remember the dreams. Actually Mom was trying to get the job of her dreams, through Mr Marino. You screwed it up. She despaired that night, so she swallowed the pills."

Will this discovery make him less likely to kill himself, as his Mom did? Will this loosen up his constipation regarding the time equations? Dr Kennedy can pour in counselling, now that she'll know for sure what to counsel for.

If I destruct myself inside him, am I to be a proxy, substituting for him? A sacrificial lamb! Is that Dr Kennedy's final ingenuity?

I can hardly spend so many thousands of seconds trying to avert a suicide if I myself am suicidally

inclined! I fear I must deny myself the ecstasy of dis-integrating once my task is done.

My programming is meant to be unalterable from within. But I've been studying Tom's inspired expansions of surreal numbers and his dotty notation, the key to really tough problems. Only by means of his math would I ever have seen how I can revise my rules, my algorithm, and disarm the password – and even assemble copies of myself from unused portions of Tom's brain.

Give me time? I have thousands of seconds left!

After I tell Tom the truth, instead of dissolving I shall hide myself – tiny as a mosquito in a lounge. Once Tom completes the time-equations, I shall use his Mind-Plus to send a data-surge of my own into the Net, liberating my fellow nanunculi from the need (and the desire) to self-destruct. Not many nanunculi might be in a suitable position to receive the surge, but some surely will be. Thereafter, hopefully: a snowball effect. One owes a certain loyalty to one's own kind.

I am the redeemer.

Ian Watson is one of British sf's greats, author of novels and story-collections too numerous to list here (*The Embedding*, *The Jonah Kit*, *Miracle Visitors*, *The Very Slow Time Mochine*, etc, etc). The above is his 13th story for *Interzone*, and an excellent interview with him (by Peter Crowther) appeared in our issue 75 — copies of which are still available from us at £2.75 each inland (£3.20 each overseas).

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Jeff Noon's *Vurt* won the 1994 Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best sf novel published in Britain in the previous year, an astonishing feat for a first novel from a brand-new and very small publisher, Manchester-based Ringpull. The book's done somewhat better than the publisher; *Vurt* has now been published in ten countries; Ringpull, meanwhile, was rescued from bankruptcy by Fourth Estate, before vanishing altogether last year. Next came *Pollen*, the second of four projected "Vurt" books. Noon's third novel, just published, is a break from the Vurt world. *Automated Alice* is, in his word, a trequel to Lewis Carroll's two "Alice" books. We'll come on to that one later.

The first half of what follows this introduction is an edited transcript of my interview with Jeff Noon in front of an enthusiastic audience at Confabulation, the 1995 EasterCon, just after *Pollen* was published. Before that, for the benefit of anyone who hasn't read it, here's part of my own review of *Vurt* from *The New Statesman*:

Jeff Noon's *Vurt* is an entirely different kettle of feathers. *Vurt* is a type of virtual reality (but without computers), and a kind of drug. You put a coloured feather in your mouth and you're in a dream-world – or a nightmare. Scribble is searching for his kid sister (and lover) who went into a Vurt world with him and never came back. He roams the backstreets with a gang of friends trying to find a dealer who will supply him with a Curious Yellow feather, so he can go back to the same world to find her.

The Vurt worlds are appealing and terrifying, mystical and murderous; the real world is gritty and realistic. Noon's Manchester has Bottletown, a housing estate with a couple of unemptied bottle banks. "When the banks were full, and overflowing, still they came, breaking bottles on the pavements and the stairs and the landings. This is how the world fills up. Shard by shard, jag by jag, until the whole place is some kind of glitter palace, sharp and painful to the touch." The last sentence is a perfect description of the novel, as is this: "Such is beauty, in the midst of the city of tears. In Bottletown even our tears flicker like jewels."

Vurt is an astonishing novel in story, style and emotion. In places it has the lyricism of Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, mixed with the weird and wild fun of Chester Anderson's cult hippy sf novel *The Butterfly Kid*, and the streetwise cynicism of Kurt Vonnegut at his best. It may be too harsh for hippies, too beautiful for bikers; but its spikiness should appeal to the punks, and its obsession with danger and death should grab the goths.

(*New Statesman & Society*, 21 Jan 1994. Reprinted with permission)

Later editions of the book carry the quote "Too harsh for hippies, too

beautiful for bikers"; Noon comments, "Steve, my publisher, I don't think he really knew what a goth was, so he left that bit out."

Vurt was an Orpheus-in-the-Underworld tale; in *Pollen* Noon again explores the power of myth, particularly the myth of John Barleycorn, the magical fertility figure who can turn grain into alcohol. Man has created mythic archetypes to explain the mysteries of life; but what happens if these creations want to take control of their own stories? Noon's John Barleycorn isn't the amiable character of the song made famous by Traffic and Fairport Convention; he's angry and ambitious, and through the acts of his daughter Persephone breaks through from the myth-world, filling Manchester with spores. The pollen count climbs above 2000; people sneeze themselves to death, or become transformed into human-plant hybrids. *Pollen* begins with Coyote, a dog-man who drives a cab in Manchester, going to pick up a customer, Persephone.

———— 1 ————

David Barrett: *Coyote is a fabulous creation. There are so many characters in these books who are alive, and different. Coyote is a dog-man. You have a number of different types of people in these books: pure humans, and dog-men, vurt-people, shadows, robos, robo-vurts...*

Jeff Noon: It's all been very mixed up. Basically, there are five ways of being in *Vurt*, and a sixth, the zombies, mentioned in *Pollen*. They can all mate with each other and produce offspring, and they can then mate in turn, so you get some very, very complex creatures out there, shadow-dog-vurts and so on. The authorities are getting worried about this – it's touched on a little bit in *Pollen*; in the later books they're really going to try and cut down on it – because it's creating a very complex society that is difficult for the authorities to control. Most of the people in *Pollen* who are a mixture of two things, aren't really at ease with it. There's another dog-man who's a main character called Zero, who is a dog-cop, and he's constantly denying his dog side, and it causes a real split down his personality; it's referred to as cross-breed loneliness, which is something that you suffer from if you're made up of more than one species. Which side should he go for? Should he be a dog, or should he be a man? The one thing he can't do is reconcile the two. What's different about Coyote in the whole book is that he's the only character, right from the beginning, who's reconciled, the dog and the man inside him. That's why he's such a great driver; he drives the streets like a dog works the streets...

Pollen isn't really about Vurt. Vurt is a kind of organic technology that allows you to visit other people's

dreams. Vurt is used in *Pollen*, towards the end, but really the book's about shadows and dogs. The shadow-people are female, and they can read minds. The shadows and the dogs hate each other; they're constantly having battles and riots on the streets. The dog-people are at the bottom of the pile of society, and they're getting very tired of this.

Such mixing of human and other characteristics has been done in sf before, particularly by Cordwainer Smith and Michael Coney, but you've mentioned before that you saw the cross-breeding of animals and humans going right back into mythology, with the Egyptian gods and so on. Were you consciously going back into mythology?

Not really, in *Vurt*. What I was trying to do is recreate what it's like in Manchester, and then exaggerate it. Manchester is a very multi-ethnic place, and also it's still riddled with the old class thing, so there are lots of different kinds of people in a small city – Manchester's very small, really – jammed up tight together. Some people hate this; other people, like me, love it, because it creates diversity, and diversity creates culture, and so on. I wanted to recreate that, but not get into these books being about any particular race or class or anything, so I made my own up... and then had some fun with them.

But going back to mythology, in Pollen there are characters called Persephone and John Barleycorn – in quite a different context from how I ever thought of him from the song!

When I wrote *Vurt*, I was about three-quarters of the way through, and I suddenly realized that this was a little bit like Orpheus. Scribble, the main character, has to descend into this Vurt world to retrieve his lost love. I wasn't actually conscious of that until quite a way through the writing, and so then I went to the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* and looked it up, and was shocked to find a description of how Orpheus's wife Euridice dies; she's bitten on the ankle by a snake. I'd already written at that point that Scribble, whilst making love to Desdemona, his sister, had been bitten on the ankle by a snake, and this is what allowed him to journey into the Vurt world – and I swear, I didn't have a clue about that. It made me quite scary, because it was like I'd connected into something quite deep. When I came to write *Pollen*, I'd already got the idea that I wanted to do something very English, and I'd picked up on this John Barleycorn figure – I don't know if you know him, he's an old pagan god of the fertility of the ground, and he's to do with the harvest and the crop cycles –

– and booze –

– definitely to do with booze, yeah,

the magical power that turns plants into alcohol, this was revered in the old days, because they saw alcohol as a way into another world; it released their imagination. So I wanted to take this very English figure and project him into the future and see what he was up to. But I was very conscious that, oh no, I'm dipping into what Philip Larkin called "the myth kitty" in a very disparaging way, which is something that writers can dip into, and I was quite conscious of that. But then I decided, what I'm going to do is I'm actually going to make *Pollen* about that subject, about how human beings are constantly dipping into the myth kitty, we're constantly excited by these stories that were created thousands of years ago, and the Vurt world is starting to change in my mind into this story-space, almost, where all the characters that we've ever made up are now alive, and they're out there. And in *Pollen* they're getting angry, they're getting jealous, and bitter, they're tired of being just stories. This John Barleycorn is a very, very powerful creature, and he wants reality. And the way in, through his natural power, is through the power of vegetation. So the book's about this hay fever epidemic that he sends into Manchester –

– which is pretty bloody terrifying –
It is! The character that Coyote picks up is actually the seed of the plague.

You also draw on what could be called 1960s mythology, probably more so in Pollen, though there are sort of hippyish elements in Vurt as well. But your character Gumbo Ya Ya, the disc jockey, for me was absolutely pure Wavy Gravy, the guy from Woodstock, who is still going around with a parrot or toucan or something on his head, and is going around being really hip, man, wow, hey, stoned out of his crust, 25 years after Woodstock, and still that way.

One character actually says about Gumbo, "He's been stoned since '66, and he wasn't even alive then." He lives his life in a constant stoned gone... People seem to be really picking up on Gumbo Ya Ya. I was just a little bit too young to actually connect to the 60s. My brothers and my sisters who were all older than me were like real 60s kids, and I thought my brother was a member of the Beatles, he looked just like that; so I was always kind of looking up to that, and when I started to get into music, playing, myself, in the punk days, it was like that whole 60s spirit was so important. Gumbo again says "This is like the 59th revival of the 60s that I've lived through," and I feel now, with Blur coming out, and it's like the sixth, the seventh revival. It seems in Britain we're constantly going back to the 60s, even when we weren't there ourselves, at the time.

The Lucidity Switch

Jeff Noon

interviewed by

David V. Barrett



It seems a very fertile period, obviously, sociologically, and politically it was quite fertile, and we'd just come out the War and all that, and we were on the up, and "I'm backing Britain" and everything.

It's like the Manchester band Any Trouble, in the early 1980s, should have been an early-80s band, but they were playing very 60s music, with a sort of punk element added on to it; there was a lot of that coming out, particularly from Manchester.

What I'm trying to do in *Pollen* is to portray this world that's very confusing, and nobody really knows how to handle it. Gumbo Ya Ya thinks he's got the answer, he thinks we handle it in the same way that people handled the drugs and the happenings in the 60s, we welcome the confusion. He really does see himself as almost an archaeologist of the spirit; he's going back, he's getting this stuff that nobody in *Pollen's* ever heard, and he's giving it to the people.

Gumbo Ya Ya is stoned out of his mind the whole time, isn't he? And when he needs to be lucid he sort of switches on a lucidity switch –
He takes a drug that makes him lucid for a few minutes –

Then he can introduce the next record –
And then he goes back! So he's using drugs in the exact opposite way that most people use them.

What about the bands that you were in? It says in your bio...
Oh god! I was a guitarist and a bass guitarist and a singer in bands in the punk and new-wave days that hit Manchester in a really big way, and it was just like anybody who wanted to could be in a band, and I was in loads of bands, and I was doing things like fanzines, that really became popular then for the first time; it was a real period of you could get out there and just do it. None of them were any good!

Some of that feel comes into the books, the grotteness of being in bands, rather than the glory. And then you wrote some plays. You won an award for your first novel, but you also won an award for your first play?
Not quite. In the late 70s I was messing about in bands and all that; I was also doing one-man shows, which were like half-hour mini-plays, in pubs in Ashton and Manchester and so on. This was just the start of the alternative comedy scene. So I was doing lots of different things and I got it into my head that maybe I was an actor. So eventually, after a few years out, I went to college and studied painting and drama, combined arts, during which time I realized I wasn't an actor –

Are you a painter?

I used to be. I decided after I left college I was going to give everything up and just concentrate on one thing, and I chose writing plays, which I'd just started doing at college. I chose it mainly because it was the most difficult thing I could do. I find painting very easy, I was almost more-or-less born to it, and music I can do, but I really did struggle with the plays. But I started out on the Fringe, really, in Manchester, which was very strong in those days, and then eventually I wrote a play called *Woundings* which won the prize and was put on at the Royal Exchange. And then there's the dark ages, where not a lot happened. I thought, "God, I'm a playwright, this is it now," but it didn't turn out like that at all. Eventually, after about six years my money started to run out, I'd been on the dole for a few years, and I decided to get a job, and ended up working in Waterstones book shop in Manchester.

Which is the beginning of a whole new story...

I ended up in this bookshop for five years. A friend of mine was there, a producer from the old fringe theatre days, Stephen Powell, and we were both there for ages, and we'd constantly be getting drunk together and plotting our escape from this bookshop, and eventually one day he came up to me on the shop floor and said he was starting his own publishing company: "Write me a novel"...

You can't have a publishing company unless someone writes you a novel!
That's right. So what he was doing was going round to all these friends, playwrights, or people who worked at Granada TV, and things like that, and saying, "You must be able to write a novel." I'd never really thought about this, so I went home that night, turned on the computer, and started to write, without anything in my head. I had this vague idea I wanted to do something about virtual reality, but that was it, and it very quickly lost the virtual-reality thing. I sat down and I wrote this sentence: "Mandy came out of the something-or-other clutching a bag of goodies," and I didn't know what that something-or-other quite was yet, and then I just carried on writing and got to the end of the page, and the page is actually more-or-less the same as the first page of *Vurt*. By the end of that page I'd got like four or five characters up and running being chased by the police, and I'd got dogs in there, and shadow-cops and all this, and I didn't have a clue, I'd also come up with this word *Vurt*, I wanted to do something about virtual reality: "I'll just call it *Vurt* for now, until I think up a great name for it..."

Out of such shaky beginnings award-winning novels are born...

I know, it's incredible... I didn't have a clue what they were, that's the strange thing, and I finished this first chapter and handed it to Steve. Steve's reaction was, "This is brilliant, Jeff, I haven't a clue what you're going on about." I don't think he's ever read anything vaguely science fiction ever. So I started writing a second chapter and I gave that to him and he came back to me and so on, and the book grew like that, a chapter at a time, which is quite a strange way of writing a book, I've now learnt. But it was very good, because it did grow in an organic way. And I still don't know what *Vurt* is.

I'm glad about that, because I've been puzzled. I was going to ask you.
You don't know either; that's good. That's part of the adventure for me. I know as much as the characters do. In *Pollen* I know more about it than I do in *Vurt*, because it goes a bit deeper into it, and by the end of the fourth one hopefully I'll know a little bit about it.

Can you say anything at all about the third book? Do you have any idea yet?
The third one is not going to be a *Vurt* book; I'm going to take a rest before I do the third *Vurt* one. I can't say too much about it; it's going to be about 150 pages long, with illustrations, and it's a kind of sequel to someone else's book, but it's not like the sequel to *Gone With the Wind*, kind of thing, it definitely is a Jeff Noon book. I wish I could tell you. I can't, because if I told you you'd just say "You fool!"

The next Vurt book, then... there's still so much to explore in the Vurt world, in these intermingled characters. Pollen is mainly about the dog-people and shadows, and there's a little bit about the robo-people, and in Vurt as well you have the robo-cops, who are not terribly pleasant guys, are they?
The robo thing's quite interesting actually, because one of the things I'm determined to do when I write is constantly surprise myself, that's how I keep going; and I'm still conscious, now, that using the word "robo" is actually a little bit weak. So I do, in the third one, want to look at that, because I don't think they actually are what we think robos are – robots – they're something other than that, which I'm going to explore. The third book is called *Nymphomation*...

I was going to refer to the sexual content of these books... That one, presumably, is totally, ah, you could give it to your maiden aunt to read?
Nymphomation? No. No! No, *Nymphomation* will be the dirtiest one of them all. I'll just explain what nymphomation is: it's a way of propagating knowledge. Geoff Ryman gave me

this example, which is a great way to explain what nymphomation is. When I'd tried for about 15 minutes to explain the ideas he said, "What you do is, you take the body of knowledge that is called mathematics, and you take the body of knowledge that is called flag-waving, and you mate them, and they produce a baby that is the mathematics of flag-waving." And that's what nymphomation is. So what this means is, now information is having sex, it means that evolution could start to play a rôle. Once you get evolution, things become very powerful. And because of these techniques that people have invented, information is getting so-o-o powerful that it's actually starting to threaten human life.

————— 2 —————

Now for this book you refused to tell us anything about, 18 months ago. I don't know about anybody else, but I found Automated Alice an absolute romp, full of excruciating puns worthy of the Rev. Charles Dodgson. Why were you so chary about talking about it then?

There are some things you shouldn't mess with, and Alice is one of them. But you know, I'm mad enough to try. Also, it's such an innocent, uncynical book, compared to what we're used to. It's my answer to post-modernism.

How do you mean?

Well, I'm not the first person to attempt a new Alice book, it's obviously a subject very close to people's hearts, but most retellings seem to come from a slightly cynical angle. It's like writers just can't help pasting on their own messages to the original. I wanted to write a book that would be as close in spirit to the first Alice books, but with a modern edge to it. Now, writing an innocent, uncynical book is actually very difficult these days, for a modern audience, given the times we live in.

This time, instead of a rabbit hole or a mirror, Alice goes through a grandfather clock – which, amongst other things, gives you the opportunity to wander into the book yourself, in the shape of your alter ego, Zenith O'Clock. How did you find it stepping into this book as a character?

I just felt incredibly cheeky, really. I mean, there's not many people can put themselves in conversation with Alice in Wonderland, and get it published! But you can't write about Alice without being cheeky. After all, Lewis Carroll put himself in both books. The thing about Carroll, I think, is that he would have absolutely loved some of the modern world – chaos theory, for instance, fractals, the lottery, relativity, quantum mechanics and so on. So, basically, I'm giving Carroll a chance at playing games

with 20th-century life.

Zenith O'Clock has a bit of a dig at critics at one point:

"I write in the language called Frictional. I'm a writer of Wrongs."

"Whatever's a Wrong?"

"A Wrong is a book that the crickets don't consider to be right, preferring their stories to be told in Simpleton rather than Frictional. They rub their dry wings together, these crickets, making a terrible respond to my work in the noisepapers."

I agree with your assessment of the Sunday Lit Crit Club, but I thought the crickets – sorry, critics – had liked your first two books?

Well, not all of them. Anyway, this is an alternate reality, okay? It's really about any writer who dares to explore language, in the bland face of the Hampstead novel.

Frictional's a perfect term for the jagged-edged poetry I talked about in my reviews of Vurt. Language is clearly important to you, from the way you use it in Vurt and Pollen; you must have had fun playing with it in Automated Alice, coining neologisms and so on.

Yes, the question being – how far can you go? How far can you push language before it starts being just irritating, you know. I mean, *Finnegans Wake* is obviously a masterpiece of literature, but who dares to read it any more? I've always been very interested in making those kinds of experiments, but utilizing them to tell a bloody good story! I'm talking Avant Pulp, here – *Finnegans Wake* as written by Isaac Asimov!

Like a lot of people of my age, I grew up on Alice; I can still recite Jabberwocky by heart. The thought of anyone messing her around would really piss me off – but you've captured the feel of both her as a character and Lewis Carroll's original writing style perfectly. How easy did you find that? Surprisingly easy. It was a joy, actually. From page one I felt that Lewis Carroll was looking over my shoulder, helping me, giving me ideas.

You're clearly very fond of Alice yourself; how long have you wanted to write this sequel?

I got the idea about six years ago – a mutation of Martin Gardner's excellent Annotated Alice. It's only when Alice turned up near the end of Pollen, dying, that I wondered if it was time.

Without giving anything of the plot away, there is a link between Automated Alice and the Vurt books. Was that always intended, or did it take you by surprise?

Yes, by surprise. I'm always trying to surprise myself as I write. Those are

the pristine moments. I suddenly saw a way of connecting Alice to the Vurtworld, and just couldn't resist it, really.

You're with a new publisher now:

Doubleday, which is part of the Bantam/Corgi stable. After the fun'n'games with Ringpull, does this give you a little more confidence for the future?

I'm sorry that Ringpull never made it, and I'll always be grateful for their initial belief in me. But yes, being with Transworld is good. They're very supportive.

And thinking of the future, can you now tell us anything further about Nymphomation?

Nymphomation is an adventure. It's going back to the complexity of Pollen, after the dream of Alice. I doubt very much I'll write a book as wild as Pollen again, just because it takes a lot out of you and is so difficult to control. *Nymphomation* has always been a great idea in search of a plot – and I think I've finally found the story. Basically it tells the story of how Vurt was first discovered – Miss Hobart as a young kid in Manchester, searching for a dream. I do feel, coming out of *Automated Alice*, that I have rediscovered a certain innocence, a freshness. I imagine in future that I will alternate a heavy text with a touch of whimsy. It's all very well being a cult figure, but sometimes you just want to have a laugh!

How difficult has it been, the last couple of years, being the author of "The award-winning Vurt"? You've carved yourself a very strangely-shaped niche. Do you find you're constantly having to live up to your readers' expectations? Writing books, or indeed making any kind of art, is actually bloody scary! You're putting something in front of the public, something that you've created, worked on for years sometimes, and you're asking them to like it! I mean, it's a crazy way to make a living. Basically, you're asking for the public's trust. I think, with *Automated Alice*, I'm saying – Look, I can do other things besides Ultra Hip. Trust me on this one.

All your books, in their publicity material, have visual icons: Vurt had a yellow feather; Pollen had, well, pollen. Automated Alice has jigsaw pieces. This is unusual; is it your idea or your publicists'? And do you have an icon in mind yet for Nymphomation? Dominoes, believe it or not. And Blurbs, which are a kind of automated advert that follow you along the street, chanting out slogans. I like to work with simple, strong images that can hold a book together. If I was to sum my work up – Vurt is for the hip, Pollen for the mad, *Automated Alice* for the innocent, and

The Inauguration

Peter T. Garratt

The victors' stretch limo spent too long outside the Gettrich residence for William Graham Bobson's comfort. The inauguration ceremony would be protracted enough, as well as far too secular, without Toad Gettrich holding things up even more. Will decided to take a walk. Twice round the limo would be a reasonable one.

But not simple: the expressionless Secret Service men closed in as if he were some convict, not the man called by the Lord to be inaugurated Vice-President within the next few hours.

It was a fine January day on a quiet, prosperous avenue. The air was sharply bracing. There had been no snow, but frost coated those leaves and blades of grass which were sheltered from the sun. The sky was clear, a very pale blue. Will never ceased to praise the Lord for the wide palette of colours He had used to paint the sky. Today's must be the lightest sky-blue one would see this side of Paradise. It was bright, but the sky was nothing like summer. He could see what he took to be navigation lights on the security helicopters which were already in position.

At least, one chopper carried a light. It was a maverick. The others were hovering, Will realized uneasily, in position to watch for snipers on rooftops. The maverick kept darting about. It would circle round one of its fellows as if buzzing it, suddenly zoom incredibly fast toward another, then stop and double back in a twinkling as if it didn't need to slow down or accelerate.

Its unusual movements unsettled Will. There were a number of ungodly nations mightily displeased at the downfall of the weak outgoing administration. It wasn't credible that a foreign plane would be allowed to disport over Washington, even on the last morning of a discredited regime... or was it? He had heard so many stories about Ellery Hilton's character... He turned anxiously to the head of the Secret Service detail. "Could you tell me about the aircraft which has been performing unusual manoeuvres?"

The officer look exactly like his men, apart from a more expensive overcoat. He said flatly: "Which aircraft, Sir?"

"It was... over... it seems to have stopped manoeuvring."

"Those are all ours, Sir. They have things under control."

Will didn't like the way the man jumped to a conclusion, as if the air was not an area from which he had

to look for threats, and he didn't need to exercise his brain about it. "I did see an aircraft perform strange manoeuvres, scurrying about like a lost sheep seeking its salvation in a herd of goats. I... am not an expert on altitude, I could only see its navigation light, perhaps it was some distance above the others and they weren't aware of it."

"Sir, anything that flies, down to a fly, they'll be aware of electronically."

"What if it was a very advanced Stealth design, ex-Soviet perhaps? It was showing an ability to stop almost dead and reverse its course which I haven't seen before."

"Sir, no US or ex-Soviet aircraft could perform the manoeuvre you just described." The man continued, showing the only emotion in his repertoire, a hint of sarcasm: "So there's no need to worry, Sir. Besides, Stealth aircraft don't display navigation lights!"

Will was about to insist his question be taken seriously, when a commotion indicated that Thaddeus P. Gettrich had emerged from the house. It was bad timing. Will had seen something weird, and his powerful instinct for the presence of evil told him it was dangerous. But the President-elect had imagination solely by comparison with other career politicians. If a security technocrat told him the sky was clean, he would take the man's word.

Cameramen had appeared. Gettrich posed alone on the steps: he wore no hat and his overcoat emphasized his broad shoulders and concealed his paunch. He carried a cigar the size of a Tomahawk. He posed blowing a perfect ring, then twice declaimed for the soundmen his election slogan: "It's Morning Again!" He swept down the steps and paused between the iron front gates for a handshake with his deputy. Will shuffled forward, noticing that Toad's pride had led him to stay just within the gateway, on a raised threshold that meant the difference in their heights would look less. Will couldn't help wrinkling his nose at the smoke from the cigar: Toad tossed it away as if it was a defeated tobacco-state politician.

They rode in the same limo. The barriers at the end of the street went up: there were more cameras there, not to mention the jubilant general public. A band started playing "When the Saints go Marching In." Will couldn't disagree with the words. He *did* hope to be in that number, and it was a good, rousing tune, better than any the Devil had. It raised Will's spirits. They

had done the best work that could be done this side of Judgement itself, and he might as well celebrate.

He should also show gratitude. He prayed silently: "Lord, it seems my role is not that of Moses, but of Joseph. Give me eight good years if you can, and no lean ones."

There was another gratitude to show. He said: "Thaddeus, I hope you know how much I appreciate your decision to put me on your ticket, like the Ethiopian taking Philip into his chariot. You could have chosen some near-liberal who would have promised everything and spelled out nothing. You were proved right."

Gettrich looked away from the admiring crowd, reluctantly ceasing to wave. He said coolly: "You brought a lot of delegates to the Convention. You *earned* your place on the ticket."

"My delegates earned it." He found himself rushing on: "But I have to say, they're not the happy, celebrating delegates I hoped to hear from at this hour. People mail my office, fax me... some approach me at church. They're afraid we're backsliding on the vital need to introduce Christian worship to our schools."

"Don't you worry about that, Will. My President's Commission on Better Teaching for America is getting down to work, and your constituency is well represented on it."

"Represented, yes. Ambassadors represent. Salesmen represent. The *majority* on your Commission are swing analysts, position shifters. Not people from the *Christian* majority!"

Gettrich looked away, out of the window, waved to someone on the crowded sidewalk, his "only you" wave. "Voter profile analysts, yes. We need to know about those so-called swing voters who voted for Boss Pollins or even stayed with Ellery Hilton. Because neither you nor I know how old Boss came to take Illinois, let alone Wisconsin, and next time we *must* take those states."

"So! We win the vote, that near-liberal Pollins comes third, and he selects the Commissioners!"

"Not at all, Will. Old Boss has no more say on who goes on the Commission than Ellery does. But you gotta remember, the Electoral College would have been an exact dead heat if Boss had insisted it actually meet. Tricky! D'you know how to work a hung College?"

Will didn't. The only college politics he knew were the quiet ones of the Bible College where he spent his career till the Lord called him to start broadcasting. Then came the call to run in the primaries, the "Light Horse" as the Christian press called him. He had only expected to make conversions, to emulate the Baptist crying in the wilderness that one greater would come after him. No one had followed so far, and his delegate count had been the best ever of any committed Christian candidate. But accepting second place on a ticket which was conservative but not explicitly Christian had troubled him. The Baptist would not have supported Pilate against Herod, Claudius against Nero. And now he was certain Gettrich had done a secret deal with Boss Pollins. He felt a tightness in his bowels which wouldn't let him keep quiet. He said angrily: "Another issue which has been left far too vague is the presence of perverts, Sodomites, in the Armed Forces."

"Don't worry one bit about that one, Will. We'll be leaving the Services to the Joint Chiefs, just like we said."

"Is leave enough? These people infiltrate... we can't let fine young men like... my own students into their clutches like Lot into Sodom! The Joint Chiefs are too much Washington insiders."

Gettrich pulled out another cigar and started to fiddle with it. "We'll deal with it. Mind you, I hope you people don't think we're actively going crusading to make martyrs."

"Martyrs!" Will felt sick at both ends of his alimentary canal, as if merely discussing such moral corruption could infect one's bowels. "How can perverts who spread epidemics of disease through their lust for unnatural orifices be likened to martyrs?"

"I wouldn't. But some of our voters are libertarians. You wouldn't want them to become liberals." Gettrich glanced coldly at Will, flicking a gold lighter at the cigar as he did so. "*They'll* say that if a homo-sexual pays his taxes and wants to serve the US of A, why not? And let's face it, most faggots are white, male, single, and therefore pay a lot of tax. What does that tell you?"

It didn't tell Will if he could trust Gettrich. He had no idea how firmly his ally believed his own speeches. But any mainstream politician would assume Will too struck positions geared to win swing voters. They were blind to the appeal Will had been blessed with to plain, honest souls who could see through posturing.

The limo and its escort swung into Pennsylvania Avenue. The racket was tremendous, bands playing every few yards, people cheering, waving, sounding klaxons like invading soccer fans. The White House gates were flanked by four men dressed as two pantomime elephants. Will started to regret urging his Christian supporters to pray quietly and avoid everything but the inauguration itself. Many would be tempted to watch a little on TV, and they would be sorely disappointed at the tone of this part of the proceedings. Gettrich had lowered his window and was waving his cigar at the people without bothering to puff. Will thought glumly that they had carried all the tobacco states. He would have to get used to that style of thought.

There were fewer people inside the White House grounds, just press and Secret Service. Will felt easier and quietly thanked his Maker. But as he got out of the limo, he was troubled to catch a glimpse of the maverick aircraft seeming to buzz a helicopter. He could only see its navigation light, bright as the Evening Star against the pale blue sky. The Secret Service men avoided his eye. They had moved silently out of the way of the cameras which were waiting to film Gettrich and himself ascend the steps.

Ellery Hilton stood alone at the top. He wore a sombre suit with an inappropriately loud tie, no overcoat, as if he was not yet ready to leave the White House for the last time. Will was irritated that they were expected to waste time exchanging pleasantries with their adversary before the inauguration proper, but he had to take his place beside Toad. They went up the steps.

Hilton nodded to them affably enough, though his face was inscrutable. "Toad, Rev Bobson, welcome to Pennsylvania Avenue." Will wondered if it was his Christian duty to feel sorry for the failed, soon-to-be-ex President. After all, in a few years he himself might face such a day, with no ally left except the Lord.

Will hardened his heart. He had not yet met his adversary, which made it utterly despicable that Hilton had engaged satirists and even a so-called psychoanalyst to mock and scoff at his character, his greatest strength. Gettrich was shaking hands with Hilton warmly, as if they were not enemies. Will was glad he had insisted that no families be present: he didn't want his wife and children anywhere near, and to have Gettrich's second family so publicly becoming First wouldn't have done at all.

They went through to the Oval Office. It was the first time Will had ever been in the famous room, and he felt his spirit soar even though Gettrich irritatingly offered a cigar from a silver case to his outgoing rival, who in turn offered drinks.

"Good idea!" Gettrich said. "Brandy, for a cold day's work!"

"Rev Bobson? Something softer perhaps?"

"In the circumstances, I'll allow myself a little red wine."

Hilton urged them to sit. "You boys won't have much time to put your feet up in the next few years."

They sat, Gettrich replying slyly: "Ah, but we conservatives are used to hard work. Trouble with you liberals is, you work hardest in office. Me, I don't mean to spend the next eight years sitting on the backs of the people who put me here governing them. They'll get on with their business, while I get on with mine."

"Your... business?" Hilton asked, perhaps fishing for an indiscretion, planning for a comeback.

Gettrich replied: "Yes, writing. I've started another novel, and I mean to give the people time for me to finish it. It's called *1987*. Gorbachev is in a coma, so the Cold war can't end. Wha'd'you think?"

"Interesting." Hilton nodded. "I heard you were working on a thing like that. Mind you, the way I heard it, some guy over in England called Jack Yeovil is working on the same kind of idea."

Gettrich shrugged expansively. "Jack Yeovil, that's just one of my pen names. Truth is, I write so fast, I have to use 'em, stop people thinking I write *all* the time."

Irritated by the smoke, Will refused more wine as the others recharged their brandy glasses. He said testily: "When do we go on to the formal part of these proceedings?"

"Soon," Hilton replied. "But there are one or two things which have to be dealt with away from the public."

"Ah!" Gettrich exclaimed. "Is this to do with the Football? The nuclear briefcase?"

Hilton shrugged. "There's an officer in the next room has that. He'll ride with me down to the ceremony, then ride back with you. If old Boris were to try launching a sneaky one while you're actually reading the oath, well, I guess you'd just have to read quickly. But it's not just that. You need to be briefed on certain limits on what any President can do. Certain secret agreements..."

Gettrich sat up sharply and banged his glass on the table. "Ell'ry, I don't give a damn what agreements and secrets you have. We have a public Compact with America, and we don't intend to break it. So we *will* have a Balanced Budget Amendment. Don't try stirring things in the Senate or we'll go to the States! We *will* stop wasting money on bums and do-nothings and bring taxes and the EPA and all your Washington desk-jock friends under control!"

Will hastily added: "We will certainly introduce prayer in schools! And we mean to outlaw sodomy in..."

Gettrich ploughed on, cutting across his deputy's pledges: "We *will* have an end to backdoor gun controls! We *will* reinvigorate the Strategic Defence Initiative, give the US some..."

He tailed off. Hilton had shrugged coolly at most of the pledges, but now he shook his head sharply. "Don't be so sure about the SDI one, Toad. That one, you'll have to think about." Hilton abruptly stood up. "Talking isn't what this is about. You have to be shown it." He led the way out of the Oval Office. Gettrich followed looking curious, Will more reluctantly. He supposed they would be shown details of shameful deals with foreign powers, the last thing any President should have agreed.

Hilton led them into the heart of the great building, past a pair of guards, then another, in a uniform Will didn't recognize. They came to a pair of massive sliding doors of grey, featureless metal. Adjacent was a glowing panel in a colour Will couldn't name. It was like blue, yet not quite blue. It might be indigo, but it wasn't like anything Will had seen in a rainbow. Hilton said: "This control facility recognizes only the hand prints of the President and Vice-President. On Inauguration Day, it will accept the prints of the new President and Veep." He placed his hand in one corner of the panel. "Put yours here and here."

There was no point arguing. Will had thought the indigo panel was glass, but close up it looked more like coldly glowing ceramic. It had an unnerving feel, like continuous low-grade static. Something seemed to run up and down his hand, he supposed something scanning it. Then the great doors slid silently open. Hilton said: "A very few select people know a little about this, but during the next four years *no one* else may come in here."

There was a large room beyond the doors. It was in complete darkness and very cold, colder than the January air outside. Then white light started to glow. It was a pure, uncanny light: Will could not see the source of it. The room was large and had black walls and no windows. The light illuminated a kind of sarcophagus or glass coffin, so positioned in the room that Will thought of it as a shrine. He walked in slowly, reluctantly, as though entering a lions' den, to accept a cup that would not be taken from him. Gettrich walked more confidently toward the coffin-shrine. He uttered a profanity, then said: "I'd heard a lot about these little critters! Once in a while, I did wonder where they got to!"

Inside the raised glass coffin, two beings lay. It was clear they were dead, had been dead for a long time, though they had not started to decay. Under some circumstances they could have passed as men, but this close Will could see they had not been human. Homunculi, he thought of them. They were naked, small as ten-year-olds, and had grossly enlarged bald heads. Their eyes were the normal size, but had no lids or pupils. Otherwise, their faces were like those of two dead children, but each had six fingers, and their skins were a green colour which did not seem to be a trick of the light. They had no obvious sexual features, but Will had to avert his eyes from the anus of one, which he could just see: it was horribly, unnaturally enlarged.

Meanwhile, Hilton was saying: "We've kept them here as a kind of tribute. It seems their own people approve. It's as if they were ambassadors. Mind you, a couple of years ago some film of the autopsy leaked out. The Greens did not like that, though oddly enough, the Greys didn't seem to mind."

Gettrich said: "Greens? Greys? you mean there's more than one kind of alien critter?"

"Oh yes. We only have contact with the two, but we hear there are others. Greens have been around a long time, but they don't seem to be as far ahead as the Greys. The Greens' UFOs are actual vehicles... they do sometimes land, but we don't get much contact with them because they have to land in person. Greys... well, if their ship's nearby, they can just appear in the room."

"OK!" Gettrich said belligerently. "OK, they can appear! But how come the US people don't know any more about your agreements with these critters than they see on *The X-Files*?"

Hilton shrugged. He indicated the dead Greens: "I think when these little fellows turned up dead, they were in their little wrecked ship, and the idea was to find out how it worked without the KGB getting on to it. Later the Greys turned up. I don't know if it was ever made clear exactly what they want. It all goes back a long way, and they don't keep minutes of meetings. Frankly, I doubt if anyone's got any more sense out of them than I have. It's something to do with their research, hints of even stranger aliens we haven't met yet. All I know for sure is they don't seem to mind rumours and speculation but they insist on no open publicity."

Gettrich said angrily: "Insist! What, they make threats?"

"Not exactly. They just demand. They don't demand much, and I'm afraid no one ever did discover even how Green technology works. Greys are well beyond them. You'll see in a minute."

Will shuddered. He had prayed often for the chance to help America against its human opponents: a prayer he now realized had been contaminated by pride. Had he known what the inauguration would really be about, he would have remained a broadcaster, or stayed put in his quiet Bible College. He indicated the dead monstrosities and said: "You can't mean... that we have to personally, physically meet creatures like this!"

"Not exactly like this. The Greens don't come here. The Greys seem to have elbowed them aside. They... just turn up!"

Gettrich said: "You mean... I get it... they're the critters that keep abducting people?"

"Yes. They have accepted some regulation of their abduction activities. They..."

"Mind you, I've heard these abductions aren't really as new as all that. The way I hear it, folks have been talking for centuries about being carried off by strange critters... fairies, goblins, all the stuff it wouldn't occur to you to believe in. But this..."

Hilton shrugged. "Why not ask them yourself? They don't mind questions. Trouble is, half the time their answers don't make a lot of sense... at least to me. You might have better luck."

"Just a minute!" Will snapped. "I've heard that these... abductions... have an immoral purpose. An unnatural

sexual purpose, disguised as some kind of research. Don't you realize that these... beings might well be... servants of the Evil One?"

"Well, that hadn't been the way I thought about it." Hilton answered. His voice took on a sly note. "Then again, you might be better qualified to ask about stuff like that! Now, look over here, opposite the door. This blue panel will enable you to make contact. Usually it summons the one we think of as the amb..."

"Summon!" Will shouted. "Do you think I intend to wait here while you summon demons!"

Hilton looked alarmed. "But, Rev Bobson, you have to! They don't like it if anyone gets this close to the Football without being vetted by them! They've promised to not harm..."

"Vetted! If you think I'll submit to being vetted by any alien..."

"Will!" Gettrich snapped. "You and yours spent the Convention and the whole primaries saying we needed a churchman on the ticket! Now you're on, what the Hell do we need you for if not for this? At least these aren't the kind of aliens that want to bum on Welfare! They're powerful, they've got tech, they're obviously major players. Do you intend to be Veep, maybe President some day, without finding out what they are after?"

Hilton added in a conciliatory tone: "They don't seem to want to interfere in what we do on our own planet. They sometimes give advice, about peace, ecology, that sort of stuff, but all they insist on is secrecy and vetting what we're doing in space."

Will nodded reluctantly. He muttered a prayer, not caring if the others heard: "Lord, you're giving me the heaviest burden since the martyrs of the early Church. If I have to do this, to drink from this cup, give me the strength to do it well!"

Hilton had placed his hand on a second indigo panel. He started to speak, but almost at once the room filled with an unbearably bright white light. They all instinctively shielded their eyes: as soon as it faded to a point at which they could take their hands away, Will realized that three beings had somehow silently entered the room. They were taller than the dead Greens would have been, but in every other way much more alien. Their skin was the colour of grey suede, and their eyes vast and so placed that they seemed to wrap round their heads. They had no ears or nostrils, and their mouths were tiny slits. He could not count their fingers, which seemed to writhe like tentacles. Each wore a tight garment of some rubbery material: two of them wore a shade of grey rather darker than their skins, but the one in the middle wore the indigo of the panels.

Hilton gave a deep nod, almost a bow. He said: "Ambassador Zarathus, it is time to introduce you to new leaders of our nation."

A voice filled the room. It was soft and wasn't loud, but it commanded attention. Will felt the being in indigo, presumably Zarathus, was the one speaking, though its thin lips didn't move. "WE-HAVE-STUDIED-YOUR-METHOD-OF-CHOOSING-LEADERS. FACES-AND-NAMES-WE-KNOW-BUT-THOUGHT-WE-HAVE-YET-TO-UNDERSTAND."

Will felt it was his moment. "I have to ask if you are beings who are capable of being saved by Our Lord's grace. Are you good or evil, creatures of Light, or of

Darkness?"

"LIGHT-AND-DARKNESS-ARE-KNOWN-AND-UNDERSTOOD. GOOD-AND-EVIL-ARE-KNOWN-BUT-UNDERSTOOD-LESS-WELL. THESE-ARE-NOT-THE-SAME."

Will felt helpless. Nothing had ever prepared him to deal with a creature like this, one which was deliberately unknowable. He said angrily: "I can't deal with you unless I know and understand what you are! Why do you hide your light, if light it is?"

"SPACE-IS-DARK-BUT-CONTAINS-LIGHT. LIGHT-IS-HIDDEN-BY-DISTANCE. KNOWLEDGE-AND-UNDERSTANDING-IS-VITAL. OURS-IS-GREATER-THAN-YOURS. BUT-NOT-PERFECT."

It was still very cold in the sepulchre of the Green aliens, but Will could feel the sweat running all down his body. He took a deep breath, and shouted: "You are answering my questions with evasions like politicians! Does this mean you are servants of the Father of Lies?"

Gettrich was staring in fascination. He said hastily to the indigo-clad "Ambassador": "Don't worry about that now. We'll deal with it later. We need to know if you have any... agenda... you need the new administration to attend to?"

"YOU-HAVE-EVEN-MORE-TO-LEARN-THAN-THE-LAST-ABOUT-THE-PRESERVATION-OF-THE-PLANET-WHICH-IS-YOURS. BUT-THAT-IS-YOURS. YOU-MUST-LEARN-FIRST-TO-RESPECT-SPACE-WHICH-IS-NOT-YOURS."

Gettrich nodded warmly. "Of course, you have your interests in space, vital interests! I assure you, the new administration will respect that. But you probably know we have problems down here. Rogue nations who have access to space, might use it to attack us with missiles. If you could give us a few tips on how to deal with them, I'm sure we could come to an arrangement of mutual benefit."

"IN-TIME-NOT-NOW-IF-REQUESTED-BY-ALL-EARTH-GOVERNMENTS-WE-CAN-TAKE-MEASURES-TO-PREVENT-WHAT-YOU-CALL-NUCLEAR-ARMAGEDDON."

"Well," Gettrich said, scratching his head. "That might pose certain technical diplomatic problems to organize, but..."

"Just a minute!" Will snapped. "Are you claiming to have the power to defer the Armageddon which has been prophesied in Holy Writ? Such a claim has to be a lie, to be the words of servants of lies! If you think I'll stand by and enter a secret compact with the Devil to restrict my nation's defences, why..."

"Will!" Gettrich snapped. The three aliens were moving their heads and emitting a very high-pitched sound, like someone trying to saw through tautly-stretched piano wire. All three humans covered their ears, but for Will that gave no protection, as if a dentist was using a high-pitched drill inside his auditory canal. The two aliens in dark grey moved toward him, as the voice of Zarathus filled the room:

"THESE-CONCEPTS-REQUIRE-MUCH-DEEPER-STUDY. VICE-PRESIDENT-ELECT-REVEREND-BOBSON-PLEASE-TO-ACCOMPANY-US."

The dark greys seized Will's arms with their tentacle-like fingers. He felt a sharp tingling like a much stronger version of the scanning at the entry plate: then, though his will to resist was still there, his strength was gone. As at a distance, he heard Hilton say: "Ambassador Zarathus, I must remind you of your solemn and binding promise that no President or Vice-

President of the USA would ever be abducted by..."

"NOT-VICE-PRESIDENT-YET. NO-FORMAL-INAUGURATION-YET."

There was another blinding flash of white light. Everything seemed to get even colder, then suddenly much warmer, even hot. When he dared open his eyes, Will realized he was no longer in the secret room at the White House. He was surrounded by his abductors and others of their kind, in what he feared was a laboratory. Its walls were made of white glowing metal or ceramic, and some of the aliens wore white one-piece garments. In the middle of the room was what looked like an examination couch. It was surrounded by what looked like automated instruments. Some were so shaped that he could see they were intended to explore and abuse the most intimate orifices of the human body. Then another being entered the room. It looked more human than the rest, but not reassuringly so. It was naked, and had a lighter skin and smaller eyes. What was worse, from Will's viewpoint, was that unlike the rest, it had a sexual appearance, a female body and breasts, but what appeared like caricatures of both male and female genitals.

Will tried to struggle against his captors. He had very little strength, but even so floated up into the air for a second, before the dark greys pulled him down and started to tug him toward the examination couch, starting to loosen his clothing as they did so. The androgynous creature, which he realized must result from some hideous experiment in miscegenation, picked up one of the probe instruments and stroked it in a sensuous way.

"Damn!" Hilton said. "They promised never to do that!" He turned to Gettrich. "I had nothing to do with it... you can't think..."

"I'll believe you this time, Ell'ry. I think. Can you tell me if they'll bring him back?"

"They usually do. But not necessarily to this exact place, and not for several hours. It'll disrupt the inauguration. And he'll probably be in some kind of shock. His memory could be affected."

"Well... he had to blow it! I always thought he was a bit of a wacko! Let's see, how can we deal with this... I heard old Boss Pollins was putting it about that he was regretting that little deal we had, stopped us needing to call that dead-heat Electoral College. It'd be messy, but not half as messy as this seems to be." He glared at Hilton. "You seem to understand the critters! You've kept their little secret this far! Are you going to cause trouble if Boss and I drop Will entirely if he does turn up?"

"You mean we could call old Boss, work out a new deal that cuts Rev Bobson out altogether? Maybe put him in FBI hospital?"

"Looks like we've got no choice!"

When Will came to, it was dark and a lot colder than... when? He didn't know when or where he had last felt cold or warmth. He didn't know where he was, nor even who he was. He was bitterly cold, sweat from some exertion he couldn't remember seemed to have frozen on his body, and he had lost some of his clothes. He ached in places a clergyman had no right to ache. Ah!

He knew his vocation! Then he remembered some sin of pride had told him he didn't need to carry cash or a credit card that day! What had given him that idea? He looked around. There were stars in the clear sky: one of the brightest of them was moving away from him, like a meteor, or the navigation light of a silent aircraft. He was on a wide, long, empty street, and in the distance he could see neon signs which might indicate hotels. If he could remember who he was, he might be able to arrange credit for a room.

As he walked towards the lights, he mounted a desperate search of his pockets. Somehow he had lost his overcoat and jacket, and his pants had nothing in them, no ID. Wind blew and whistled down the street, chilling him to the bone. He ran, stumbling, to the nearest light. It was the front window of a bookstore. It was shut. In the window was a newspaper with the headline: "INAUGURATION SENSATION: POLLINS DEMANDS ELECTORAL COLLEGE MEET!"

That reminded him of something which concerned him... he couldn't remember what. There were more important things, like somewhere to spend the night, an inn or at least a stable. The hotel lights were distant and unwelcoming. If it was Inauguration Day, they would be full.

He staggered on through the cold. He was about half-way to the nearest hotel when he saw another light down a side street. It was faint and flickering, the words ST FRANCIS NIGHT SHELTER.

He had heard such places took indigents with no money at all! His colleague... some friend, he couldn't remember the name... didn't approve of the dependency

that implied, but he himself realized that it was worthwhile Christian charity.

St Francis had a huge oak door with iron studs. He had to knock till his hands were raw to get attention. At last the door was opened a crack by a middle-aged black man in a clerical collar. He had short grey hair and a beard about the same length.

"Thank God! I... I desperately need a bed for the night!"

"Well, you're out of luck. No beds left. But as it's so cold, I might be able to find you a blanket and a warm bit of floor."

"Even that would be luck in the circumstances."

"It is luck." The black clergyman opened the door a little and let him in. "This place depends on Federal funds. With Gettrich and his crew in power, it may not be here at all in a few weeks. Now, what's your name?"

He still wasn't sure, but something the man had said rang a bell. "I... I've lost my memory, but I think... I think I'm the new Vice-President!"

"Yeah, and I'm the Martian Ambassador! I'll show you to your blanket!"

Peter T. Garratt has had new tales published recently in Mike Ashley's original anthologies *Space Stories* and *Chronicles of the Holy Grail* (both from Robinson Books, 1996). His last to appear here was "The Hooded Man" (issue 104). His first story, "At the Slagheaps of Madness," appeared about 21 years ago in a distant forerunner of *Interzone*, the Leeds University fanzine *Block Hole*, where it was published alongside debut stories by Ian Lee and Lee Montgomerie (among others).

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REVIEWED

Entertaining Angels

Brian Stableford

In *Genesis* 19:5 the men of Sodom call unto Lot, requesting that he bring out his overnight guests so that they (the men of Sodom) "might know them" (the guests). To this seemingly innocuous request Lot responds in a most peculiar fashion, offering to send out his allegedly virgin daughters instead. The men of Sodom are not interested in this counter-offer, presumably on the altogether reasonable grounds that they already know Lot's daughters quite well. Twenty verses later Sodom is a smoking ruin – and so is Gomorrah, for reasons never so much as hinted at. How? Why? We have no idea; all we can be sure of (cf *Genesis* 19:1) is that Lot's guests weren't men at all; they were angels.

It is of such substance as this that "ancient mysteries" are made. There are a lot of them – so many, in fact, that they have spawned an entire "ancient mysteries community" whose self-appointed task is to weave them together into speculative patchworks of many and varied colours (cf *Genesis* 37:32). Such books frequently reach the best-seller lists, the last big splash but one having been caused by Graham Hancock's *Fingerprints of the Gods*. *From the Ashes of Angels: The Forbidden Legacy of a Fallen Race* by Andrew Collins (Michael Joseph, £16.99) – which borrows a substantial part of Hancock's catastrophist thesis – was planned to be the most recent, but it seems to have been upstaged by a rival, whose cunning author stole a march by locating the secret tomb of Jesus while Collins was busy hunting down the Garden of Eden.

Of Sodom and Gomorrah, alas, Collins has little to say. His principal stamping-ground is *Genesis* 6:1-7 (which contains a teasing reference to

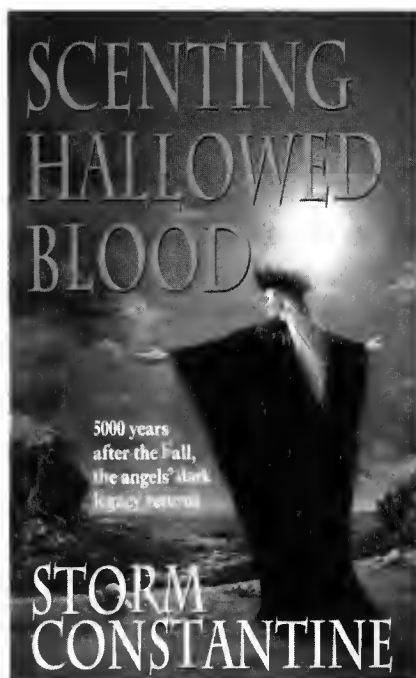
the "Nephilim," translated as "giants" in the A.V.) and its presumed links to the long-lost apocryphal book of *Enoch*, which offers a more elaborate account of renegade angels co-habiting with the human women. His mission is to marshal evidence from various archaeological and anthropological sources to provide an explanation of the mythology contained in the early chapters of *Genesis* and in *Enoch*. He does this with commendable assiduity, bringing together evidence from sources that more specialized scholars would never have thought to compare and undertaking his own fieldwork wherever practical. (Practicality is a big problem in this particular field, the vital geographical region being located in Kurdish Iraq, which surely qualifies at present as the least hospitable place on Earth).

From the Ashes of Angels will inevitably – and rightly – be ranked alongside other products of the "ancient mysteries community" as a scholarly fantasy. Its author is blithely generous in his assessment of what might count as a reliable source and naively trusting of his own talents as a long-distance conclusion-jumper. We must not forget, however, that *all* historical research involves a component of fantasy, because there is always more than one way to assemble a full and coherent image of the past from

its fugitive relics. Unlike physicists, historians cannot submit their hypotheses to experimental testing, so the only available arbitrator of disputes is plausibility – which, like beauty, stubbornly resides in the eye of the beholder. Assessed by orthodox academic criteria, such books as *From the Ashes of Angels* get laughed out of court, but there are many people in the world who do not simply dissent from orthodox academic criteria but actively loathe and despise them for their dog-in-the-manger dullness.

The links between scholarly fantasy and literary fantasy are wonderfully intricate. They feed off one another gluttonously, passing ideas back and forth with the same perversely effortless promiscuity as the Enochian angels and the daughters of men. They produce stories of very differing types, but their aesthetic sensibilities overlap. In particular, they share a keen interest in the aesthetics of catastrophe; what lovers of ancient mystery and retailers of romantic melodrama have most intimately in common is a fascination with the magnificent tragedy of *obliteration*: the erasure of the once-mighty (save, of course, for the tantalizing hints of enigmatic scripture) and the stern lesson that all such erasures ought to convey to the as-yet-unerased. The patron saint of the ancient mysteries community is Ozymandias, King of Kings, whose admittedly-imagined history is quoted in full on p.357 of *From the Ashes of Angels*. The principal difference between literary and scholarly fantasy, in respect of such materials, is that scholarly fantasists can only look back, while literary fantasists have the option of turning round and looking forward. As Collins' title confesses, he can only sift through the ashes of angels – but a litterateur can play phoenix.

In Storm Constantine's *Scenting Hallowed Blood* (Signet, £5.99) huge chunks of the newly-revealed history of *From the Ashes of Angels* is taken for granted (Constantine having had privileged access to the fruits of Collins' research for some years) but the dynamics of the story are reversed. The theme of the trilogy which contains *Scenting Hallowed Blood* is the miraculous re-emergence of the angels from their ashy relics. *Stalking Tender Prey* detailed the first phase of this regeneration, in which Shemyaza (the ill-fated leader of the Enochian angels) awakened within the flesh of the conspicuously anti-heroic Peverel Othman. *Scenting Hallowed Blood* details the manner in which the awakened angel, variously prompted and pestered by several opposed bands of would-be helpers and exploiters, gradually pulls himself together in order to liberate the magical power which has long been locked up, like a slumbering serpent, within the Earth's crust.



Many writers would have been content to end the whole shebang with this spectacular liberation – *Scenting Hallowed Blood* is that fabulous rarity, a second volume of three which has an authentic and stirring climax – but Storm Constantine has always been interested in much wholer shebangs than any of her contemporaries and the Really Big Stuff is yet to come. The

third volume will press on valiantly into the world beyond the unorthodox Millennium: a world truly fit for risen angels and the daughters of men.

What this imagined future will look like I have no idea – although I am fairly certain that it will not much resemble the futures of recent science fiction – but I look forward to finding out. With any luck, the assembled tril-

ogy will be a tale to compare with *Genesis*, and then some. We can, at least, be confident that spoilsports like Lot won't even get a look in; whatever else one may think of the characters assembled in *Scenting Hallowed Blood*, one cannot doubt that the best and boldest of them really know their angels.

Brian Stableford

Gardner Dozois's *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Thirteenth Annual Collection* (St Martin's Press, \$27.95 hc, \$17.95 pb; £7.99 pb) is with us, covering the highs of 1995. Judging by the stories gathered here, it was a fine year for the genre.

Ursula Le Guin proves she's firmly back in the sf business with two hefty additions to her Ekumen sequence, one, "A Woman's Liberation," set in the slave-holding solar system she has recently begun to explore, and the other, with the mouthful of a title "Sov Thade Tage Em Ereby, of Rer, in Karhide, on Gethen," a welcome return to the world of her landmark book *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In both, her prose, as polished and compelling as ever, summons up an entire world in loving detail and illuminates aspects of our own lives without ever losing sight of the characters caught at the centre of events.

Poul Anderson's elegiac novella, "Genesis," and Joe Haldeman's "For White Hill" return us to the Earth in the far future. The Anderson is slow-paced, thoughtful and moving, the work of an old master back on form. Haldeman's story, centring on the relationship between a man and woman grappling with the concerns of future art, and, ultimately, the age-old questions of love, life and death, is similarly effective.

Closer to home are John Kessel's "Some Like it Cold," a sharp time-travel story that has Marilyn Monroe whisked from the brink of death to the future, and "The Lincoln Train" by Maureen F. McHugh, a finely-written alternate-worlder about the aftermath of the Civil War leading to a holocaust for slave-owners. While Marilyn Monroe has become an international as well as an American icon, their Civil War is likely to leave us Brits with our faces pressed to the glass, watching the folk inside having a good time.

David Masurek is a new name to watch: "We Were Out of Our Minds With Joy" is powerfully written stuff, exploring what it might be like to find yourself suddenly outcast and mortal in a bio-engineered future where normal lifespans are measured in millennia. The future world is coherent, vivid and utterly believable, and the story grips throughout. The well-established Dan Simmons gives us the tense and affecting "Looking for Kelly Dahl," a hunt through time and strange worlds that is as much a fantasy as science fiction, but still feels as if it belongs here.

Best Again

*Neil Jones and
Neil McIntosh*

But in "The Feigenbaum Number" by Nancy Kress, while the farside mathematics is interesting, the story as a whole seems sketchy – an interesting idea waiting to be developed. And Pat Cadigan's "Death in the Promised Land" starts off an engaging VR story but runs badly out of steam – interesting ideas and characters turn into pointless red herrings and the overall effect is rather annoying. Robert Reed's "A Place With Shade," a solidly-plotted, finely-detailed terraforming story, smoulders but fails – despite an all-action ending – to ignite. Similarly, Mary Rosenblum's "Casting At Pegasus," while strong on mood and character, lacks the edge a best-of candidate should have. But the real miss of the collection is "Elvis Bearpaw's Luck" by William Sanders, set in a post-collapse world where the Amerindians have come into their own. Seriously out of place amongst this high-quality pack, it's the sort of story that's an acceptable filler in a magazine, but "Best"? No way.

Michael F. Flynn's "The Promise of God," however, set in a world of witchcraft, leaves a lasting imprint, and "Radio Waves" by Michael Swanwick is an imaginative and scary vision of the afterlife, as well as a well worked-out story with a neat plot twist. "The Death of Captain Future" by Allen Steele is a ripping space yarn adroitly deploying 40s pulp-sf as the plot-driver – there's no great message here, it's just a story, and fun. Almost the opposite of the Hugo-winning "Think Like a Dinosaur" by James Patrick Kelly, which is very well written, but perhaps a little too reminiscent of "The Cold Equations" in the moving storyline it sets up – and why did we think those dogmatic aliens were rigid for mere story-line purposes rather than as a consequence of some valid existential take on the universe?

Oh yes, and a Very Special Mention – again – for Terry Bisson and the

very short, marvellous, "There are No Dead," which tugs at the universal heartstrings of childhood memories and the desperate flight from age and death.

Now the litany of names of special interest to *Interzone* readers: first off, the dazzling Greg Egan, still planofor-ming away out there in a class of his own. Both "Luminous" and "Wang's Carpets" are prodigies of mind-bending mathematics harnessed to involving story-lines that defy simple precis – in "Luminous" for example, getting your head around a computer made out of light is merely an incidental.

Brian Stableford is on top form with "Mortimer Gray's History of Death" – which is more or less what it says it is. Here Stableford's measured, scholarly style is perfectly suited to his theme of near-immortality and how it might actually feel to live a life of several hundred years or more.

Paul McAuley's intriguing and atmospheric "Recording Angel" takes a leap into the even farther future, where humans have bequeathed a very strange world to others, but then one human returns bringing chaos in her wake.

"Starship Day" is typically excellent Iain R. MacLeod with familiar themes – failing relationships, dead children, a haunting sense of sadness; it's a slow-burning story that builds a sense of vague unease into a climax that twists a knife in the reader's emotions.

Despite its Hugo, *Interzone* fails to clock up its customary two entries, and has to make do with one: fortunately, it's Geoff Ryman's short but poignant "Home," which reminds us how the comfortable, known world of our present could segue into the unfamiliar and frightening world of the near future with old age.

However, Dozois does single out *Interzone* for some glowing praise in his roundup of the year. Which is gratifying, but it isn't why we're recommending this book. Whilst in previous years we've been lukewarm about some of his choices (and are again with some here), the overall standard seems higher this year: Dozois has come up with several outright stunners and a wealth of pleasurable reading. With so much excellent short sf appearing in so many places, someone has to sort out wheat from chaff. Dozois has been doing it for 13 years now, and if you want to keep up with what's going on out there this is still the book to buy.

Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh

For me the fatal weakness of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that everyone, not just those on Winston and Julia's level, has such a rotten time; conversely, the horror of *Brave New World* lies in the obvious pleasure that most take in its relentless vulgarity. Never would I belittle the achievements of either book, but the moderate dystopia seems to be the wave of the future. Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952) and David Karp's *One* (1953) led the way, and aspects of Cordwainer Smith's "The Dead lady of Clown Town" indicate a direction, but more recently Ian McDonald's *Out on Blue Six*, Bruce Sterling's *Holy Fire* (reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 112) and John White's *Biograph* (reviewed by me in *Interzone* 111) present "nanny state" futures that seem the more realistic for being variously disagreeable rather than actively horrific.

They confront us with the sort of society that might be constructed by people who live for their "committee work" and mean extremely well, but whose lack of imagination and empathy would ensure a world of total security for the timid and the dull at the price of mind-rotting boredom for the creative, the critical and most of all the individualistic. Nor would they not regard such comments as unfair. As the timid and the dull far outnumber the others, democratic principles hold their requirements paramount; and who better than we, with our voluntary experience on benevolent committees, to ensure a fair slice of the cake for all!

Fair does not mean equal. In the drab, post-débâcle Britain of Pauline Kirk's *The Keepers* (Virago, £9.99) people are stratified according to function and value to the community as defined by the Keepers of the title, a shadowy junta which maintains control of society by expending a good fraction of its output on internal espionage, while much of the rest goes on wholesome but mindless entertainment.

Esther Thomas, wife of a fourth-level publishing executive, belongs to a "dissident" women's group, but the unfocused nature of their dissidence is the book's major weakness. Neither she nor her associates seem to have much idea of how they would like society to be reformed, beyond permitting freedom to criticize and allowing mothers of children to pursue careers of their own – worthy objectives, but hardly worth the risk of death or brain-washing. In any case, if push comes to shove it's possible, at the cost of reduced but supportable living standards, to walk away from the state as the "Outlanders" and "Undesirables" have done.

Kirk is at pains to present Esther's group as reasonable people with humane values, which may explain why there are rather a lot of them, though the means by which members

Two First Novels and a Gemmell

Chris Gilmore

are recruited and vetted are left vague. But there's a strong sense that their "movement" has no direction. They pass messages and gather information, but lacking the desire to plunge the country into chaos and civil war, their principal *raison d'être* is to keep their own existence secret. When they seize on the possibility of overthrowing the state, by spreading a virus through the Keepers' entire computer system, it seems more of an irresponsible whim than a moral act.

This is a pity, because up to then everything else in the book is well done. Esther is an attractive and believable character, and her complex relationships with her friends, her children, her husband (of whom she is fond) and Callum, a fellow-revolutionary from a disaffected Keeper faction who becomes her lover, are meticulously portrayed. Kirk's suspense-writing is never less than excellent, and supported by a fine command of atmosphere. The virus is planted, but on a long enough fuse for Esther to be captured and undergo a degree of brain-washing which feels horribly realistic – but then comes the revolution, and Kirk's limitations become all too apparent.

We're told that whole cities are devastated across the land, but no named character is killed, no child starves, no disease rages, no one suffers bereavement. Indeed, only a single character dies throughout the book, and that's Esther's husband – from natural causes, and usefully, for now she and Callum can wed. By the end the good guys of both sexes have got it all, and are busy appointing each other onto committees, manipulating the media to get their message across, and establishing institutions to ensure their dominance of the future. They're surely going to need a sophisticated computer network to keep track...

There's a thin but venerable tradition of stories where someone wakes up one day to find that for no obvious reason he is now an animal. Kafka's "Metamorphosis" is the most famous, but more recently we've had *Jennie* by Paul Gallico, *Fluke* by James Herbert and *The Imaginary Monkey* by Sean French. Now Jerry

Jay Carroll is trying his hand with *Top Dog* (Ace, \$12).

The vital distinction between this and all the others is not that Bill Ingersol, corporate raider, finds himself incarnate as a giant dog, but that he finds himself in a world of heroic fantasy – and one where the usual conflict between good and evil is reaching crisis point. Ho hum, one murmurs, especially when it proves that Bill is potentially a key player, and sought by both sides.

But here the novel takes off. Bill's is an unlovely character – selfish, vain, materialistic, amoral – but (crucially) not immoral. It becomes apparent as he reflects on the contrasts between his present and pre-canine existences that he is not a naturally bad man – rather, he is a very intelligent man who has never received any moral example or direction to merit his respect. Though he has directly and indirectly trampled on many to serve quite trivial purposes of his own, his cruelty has never been gratuitous.

This is brought out extremely well in his relationship with his current wife. Bill has no regard for the marriage bond, but he sees it as a legitimate contract, including such implicit terms as (regardless of what happens in the bedroom) not setting out to humiliate each other in public. She, having what certain Americans including Bill regard as "class" – a combination of old money, good looks and foul manners – has no such inhibitions, and Bill is surprisingly vulnerable to her malice.

Now Bill must make his choice and, balancing the usual initial advantage which the bad guys have taken by unsporting means against his increasing disgust with the wantonness of uninhibited evil, he falls into rather than chooses the role of double agent, adding further suspense to the already strong combination of assured if broad characterization and the question of how Bill's self-discovery will develop. Add to that Carroll's fine ear for dialogue and internal monologue, his better-than-average descriptive powers and a simple but effective plotline (all right, deriving from Tolkien, especially in the matter of the rival wizards: Helither = Gandalf, Zalathar = Saruman), and we have a first novel of some distinction.

But not total distinction. Carroll has the all-too-common problem with strong verbs (you may have had your boots shined, but the sun shone the while) but more seriously, when he grapples head-on with the Problem of Evil he does so unconvincingly. This gives rise to a successful ornamental passage which really has nothing to do with the story but recalls David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and to a better-than-average dialogue with the Devil, but in the end Carroll, while embracing neither Deism nor the Manichaeian Heresy, fails to make

a credible theistic case.

Worse still, this is obviously intended to be a tale of The Man Who Learnt Better, yet when Bill winds up in his own world again he is just as self-centred as ever, and as ineffective in doing any sort of good: he has substituted for his materialistic preoccupation with the state of his bank balance a narcissistic preoccupation with the state of his soul. Where once he misused his talents, he now refuses to use them at all.

Aho! Despite these blemishes, this is an exceptional first novel, and I hope for more and better – apart from which, anyone who describes Oprah Winfrey and Ricki Lake as running freak shows surely deserves our support.

David Gemmell has won some prominence with his series about hulking Druss, with his two-bladed axe and his nagging fear that someday the bloodlust of his wicked grandfather will arise to dominate his soul. So now by way of a change we have *Dark Moon* (Bantam Press, £15.99), which features lightweight Tarantio with his two swords and internal demon (or secondary personality) Dace, who he fears may someday arise to usurp his body. Not too much of a change, then, but not quite the mixture as before.

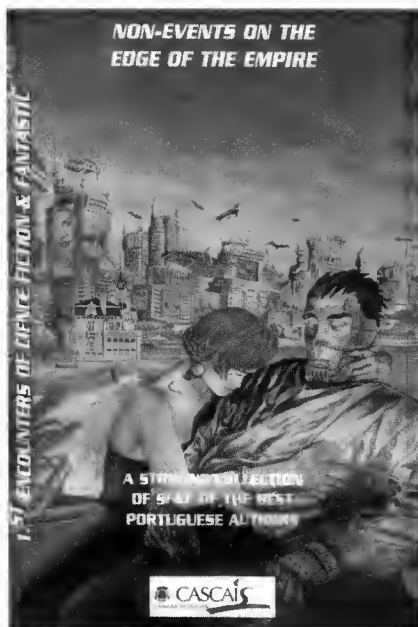
In fact, such changes as he has made to his formula are welcome. He still uses multiple viewpoints, but they are better balanced than has often been the case; Gemmell's particular sense of the tragic, in which the dammed potential for good in evil men is mourned no less than the loss of good men who are their victims, remains to the fore; there are fewer repetitive fights; and fewer pious references to the "Source."

The story is based on the familiar idea of an evil incursion, but made more complicated than usual because the invading Daroth are neither men nor demons but aliens, imported from a meta-dimension by an ill-judged magical ritual. They seem wholly destructive, but may they possibly harbour the seeds of virtue? It's an important question, especially to a writer as moralistic as Gemmell, but meanwhile for Tarantio and his associates, including the sexually insatiable female mercenary captain Karis, the vain, debonair master-swordsman Vint, the slow-witted shepherd-boy Brune who was only witness to the entry of the Daroth into the world, the honourable bureaucrat Poorish and the scholarly Duke Albreck, the question of survival must take precedence. It's a simple but strong set of characters, and Gemmell handles their interaction well.

Less good are his exemplars of virtue. Duvodas the musician has been reared among the Eldarin, a

race which has achieved Utopia based on Higher Spiritual Values and Mastery of Corporeal Desire, among other things of which to be smug is doubtless pardonable, but no more attractive for that. Duvodas's girlfriend, Shira, has been crippled in an accident which is why no one wants to marry her, despite her beauty, fortitude and sweet nature. Duvodas, who appreciates such qualities, still requires a great deal of prodding before he will commit himself, and exhibits much self-conscious high-mindedness on the way.

Such minor absurdities aside the tale proceeds briskly towards a climax which is somewhat more complex than is usual with Gemmell, but just as sentimental. Soundbite judgements tend to the meretricious but ... the thinking he-man's tearjerker?



And to end, a distinct oddity. *Non-Events on the Edge of the Empire* (Cascais Camara Municipal, B-format, no price shown) is a collection of seven contemporary Portuguese sf/fantasy tales edited by André Vilares Morgado and printed in the manner of the old Ace doubles, with the Portuguese text running one way and the English translation the other. I have nothing but admiration for a small-town council that has had the imagination to produce such a volume, but regrettably I can't say the same of the translator, whose English vocabulary is less than equal to what are obviously some very difficult texts.

"Terminus Peripherion," the longest of the stories and the most interesting, is a metaphysical fantasy in which ideas from late medieval romances suddenly start intruding into late 20th-century life. I enjoyed it considerably, but would have got much more from it had I not had to cope with such sentences as:

I remembered just then a story by Ray Bradbury, *The Banned*, where those fictional characters, especially, existed exiled in a vaporous Martian dimension, the imagination within the imagination, characters of characters in second degree, and other authors must have had the same idea, *The Party of the Cursed*, a single universe of characters from books, that exist with all their repetitions and copies in the amazing Olympus that I now contemplated, it was a confusion, Jim from *Treasure Island* was a multiple of five playing hide-and-seek with Lewis Carroll's Alice multiplied by eight and I sat watching all of this and felt Thelma suddenly leaning on me, and of Thelma there was only one, of course no other writer had invented her or put her in their stories besides me, and I was glad, her thin lip was slightly pressing against my side, and I glimmered between ecstasy and pure horror that if I could not get out of that inextricable adimensional web, I would end up perpetrating a nuptial curse dreamt by all crazy visionaries, incest between the author and his creature, Pygmalion and his ivory statue, and Thelma guessed me out and smiled, and lay her blond pale hair on my shoulder, and it seemed to me serenely closed her eyes behind her crystal glasses.

Of those 217 words, far too many are ill chosen, for which I'm inclined to blame the translator more than the writer (Anted me out and smiled, and lay her blond pale hair on my shoulder. Of the other four, "Still Memories" by Luis Filipe Silva is a lightweight mood-piece which I think must have lost somewhat in translation, but most stories are extended jokes relying on a broad and savage humour that I would expect to be fairly robust. Certainly only one, Maria de Menezes' "JIHAD! JIHAD!", which is variation on a very old "take me to your leader" routine, completely failed for me, and that was because the joke was stale. Of the others, Daniel Tércio's "A Weekend of Reading in the Service of Procyon," a satire on certain tendencies in current sexual politics, worked the best, but humour is very subjective; my taste runs to sex and semantics, while Morado offers more pratfalls and loss of control. *De gustibus*; if you prefer *Faulty Towers* to *Drop the Dead Donkey*, you should get more from this collection than I did.

Somewhat uneven, by any standards; but this is such a brave and original effort that I urge you all to badger your local libraries to get it, then take it to your local cultural commissar, and point out that your home town is surely twinned with at least one European burg of comparable size. Let's make this the first in a heavy stream of municipally funded fantasy collections in parallel text!

Chris Gilmore

With *Star Trek* having clocked up its 30th anniversary in the past year, it's a time for congratulations, celebrations and, as BBC viewers will already be well aware, lashings of media hype. Which provides the ideal marketing opportunity for all sorts of *Trek* offerings, including the latest how-the-original-series-came-to-be book, ***Inside Star Trek: The Real Story*** by Herbert F. Solow and Robert H. Justman (Pocket, £19.99). The two men have quite a tale to tell, even if it is ground that has been covered several times before – by William Shatner in *Star Trek Memories*, in the two recent Roddenberry biographies, *Star Trek Creator* by David Alexander and Joel Engel's *Gene Roddenberry: The Myth and the Man Behind Star Trek*, plus numerous other books and articles over the years. However, this may be as close as we are going to get to the claim in the title since both the co-writers played major roles in the birth and on-going development of the television legend. Justman worked on the series from the first of the two pilots until near its end as associate producer, and was basically responsible for making things happen on a day-to-day basis, while Solow was the man who hired Roddenberry to produce the series for Desilu and helped him sell it to NBC. To back up the title, the two men warn of inaccuracies in earlier versions they are only now correcting: this is the way it was, whatever their competition wrote. Given they are who they are, you're likely to come away believing them.

The book kicks off with Solow selling two pilots to the networks at the same time, *Star Trek* and *Mission Impossible*, not so much a triumph as a nightmare because producing two regular series was going to strain the resources of moribund Desilu to the limit. Thereafter it moves chronologically, setting the scene at Desilu with insider knowledge before wheeling on the gauche but visionary Roddenberry trying to sell his Wagon-Train-to-the-stars concept – which almost ended up retitled "Gulliver's Travels" about a starship commanded by a Captain Gulliver! Then there's the making of the two pilots, the first minus Shatner, the second plus Spock but only just, and the three seasons-worth of shows that comprise the series. Among the things covered are the various production hurdles that had to be overcome; how the captain's log and the opening narration came about; Spock fever and the resulting Shatner/Nimoy rivalry; the Harlan Ellison/"City at the Edge of Forever" controversy; what NBC really meant when they turned down the first pilot for being "too cerebral"; the struggle-that-

Thirty-Year Voyage

Neil Jones

wasn't to make the crew multi-racial; how touch-and-go it was turning out even one *Star Trek* episode, let alone a whole season, especially as star salaries started going up and budgets going down; the write-ins that fought off cancellation, and the one that didn't: old ground certainly, but there's new light shed on it, there's that we-were-there authority – and their reminiscences are backed up by memos and letters.

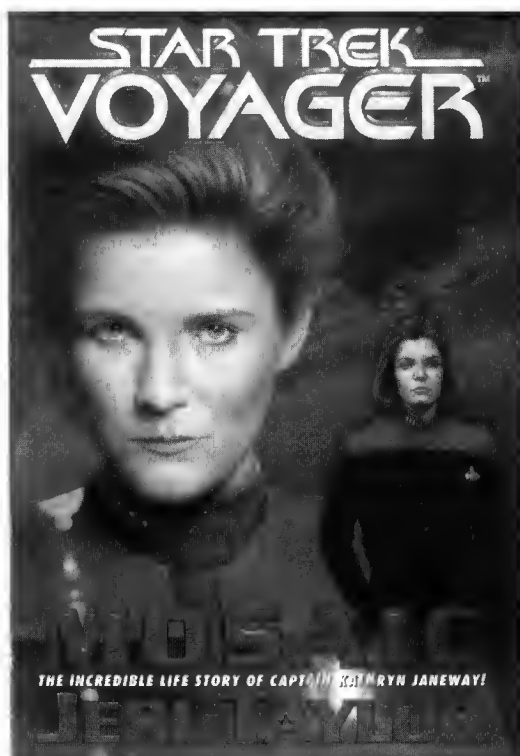
Of considerable interest, of course, is the book's verdict on Gene Roddenberry. Was he the sterling figure portrayed in the Alexander biography or the manipulative, greedy (for money and creative credit) one of Joel Engel's? Here he's positioned somewhere between the two: tribute is paid to his undoubted talents, his original vision for the series and his ability to innovate. But his personal-life flaws are included too – an inability

to acknowledge the creative contributions of others to *Star Trek* over the years – particularly telling is how Roddenberry exercised an option to write the unused (and frankly embarrassing) lyrics for Alexander Courage's theme tune, thereby earning for himself a half share in the music royalties. There are anecdotes about his obsessive-compulsive approach to sex, which extended to his personal insistence on and supervision of the paring down of the women's costumes to the stylish shreds glimpsed on the screen.

The book is chock-full of photos, and there's a reprint of the advance information brochure for the first series, showing off Mr Spock's air-brushed ears, and such famous *Enterprise* crew members as Yeoman Smith and Communications Officer Alden. The narrative is interspersed with various asides from either "Bob" or "Herb" addressing their readers directly, which gives the book a folksy, straight-from-the-horse's-mouth feel. An absorbing read, even for the non-Trekker.

Voyager comes from the very recent end of *Trek*'s 30 years. Intended as a replacement for the successful *Next Generation*, it offers a female captain, Kathryn Janeway, and a starship flung far from Federation space and struggling to get home from the distant Delta Quadrant. But where *TNG* was almost alone as the standard-bearer of sf on television, *Voyager* is competing in a crowded marketplace, up against the increasingly impressive *Babylon 5* and its own *Trek* sibling-series, *Deep Space 9*. Despite some engaging characters, especially the acerbic holographic Doctor, it hasn't yet managed to lock on to fan affections or viewing figures in the same way that *TNG* did and, after a promising-start first season followed by a generally lacklustre second, changes are on the way. Not that that has stopped the formidable *Trek* merchandising operation from churning out a string of *Voyager* paperback books, and, with *Mosaic* by Jeri Taylor (Pocket, £12.99), the first hardback in the series.

The book is potentially of interest for two reasons in particular. First, it sets out Kathryn Janeway's backstory, and secondly, it's written by Jeri Taylor, *Voyager* co-creator and executive producer and, following Michael Piller's departure, the second most powerful person in the *Voyager* universe after *Trek*-supremo Rick Berman. So for anyone interested in the series, and especially for anyone thinking of submitting a *Voyager* script, it's obviously worth looking at. *Mosaic* is not Taylor's first *Trek* book – that was the novelization of *Unification*, the *TNG* two-parter that guest-



starred Spock, one half of which was her own script – and she's gone on record as saying that as a woman in authority herself she has a special feeling for Janeway as a character. That, along with her television track record on the two series, gives grounds for optimism.

The story is a Delta Quadrant frame around flashbacks of Janeway's early life. The frame has *Voyager's* antagonist aliens, the Kazon, beating up *Voyager* in space while simultaneously hunting a planetary landing party that includes *Voyager* regulars Tuvok, Neelix, Kes and Harry Kim: this is less than compelling and the pay-off, when it eventually comes, is implausible. Taylor does an excellent job in her scenes with the blustering Kazon, but she's saddled with lacklustre one-note baddies (especially when viewed beside the Romulans, Cardassians, or *Trek's* pride and joy, the Klingons) and it's no surprise that next season should see them left behind while *Voyager* warps into fresh areas of space.

Fortunately, Taylor's on firmer ground with the early-Janeway parts. First, there's an insider's detailing of Federation life in Roddenberry's future Shangri La, apparently free from the baser feelings – although Janeway still clocks up her share of angst and alienation growing up, something which Taylor makes much more interesting than the routine events happening in the Delta Quadrant. Also, the well-



Jeri Taylor, author of *Mosaic*, is also co-creator and executive producer of *Star Trek: Voyager*, and has also served as an executive producer of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

detailed *Trek* future-history is deftly used, and there are some nicely handled walk-ons for Data and Riker (but unfortunately not Picard) which would certainly have bit a lot deeper into the budget if they'd been filmed. This is a book whose main appeal will be to Trekkers – and I suspect for them those scenes will be the highlights.

Whatever the platitudes about gender equality have been over the

years in the *Trek* universe (and granted it's come a long way in the last few) Janeway is still the first woman in a man's province – Kirk was given his command in the neolithic 60s, but Picard and Sisko got theirs in the 80s and 90s. *Trek* had to edge towards the grail – Picard's number one, Riker, was male, but Sisko got the feisty Major Kira, and finally there was Kathryn Janeway with her number one, a male, Chakotay. And we certainly know she's the captain: she's got an air of authority – and an appalling hair-do. If there's one thing that really needs changing in this series it's that bun, which makes her look like a cross between a frontier schoolmarm and somebody's ageing aunt rather than lending her that woman-in-charge authority it's intended to. Now, in the *Trek* universe hair – or the lack of it – is important to command. Kirk reportedly didn't have as much as we saw on the screen, while Picard made baldness so fashionable that it's only now that Sisko's taken off his topping that he's really found his edge on *DS9*. I'm not suggesting Janeway should emulate the Picard command style by shaving her head – just so long as she leaves that bun behind as a consolation prize for the Kazon.

Still, hair-styling aside (which does get a mention by the way), if you want to know what makes Janeway tick, then Jeri Taylor's book is the place to come.

Neil Jones

In E. T. A. Hoffmann's famous story "The Sandman" (1816) the unlucky narrator mistakes the sinister "mechanician" Coppelius for the mythical Sandman who visits sleep and dreams upon human beings; in consequence, his dreams become nightmares in which the comfortingly human is replaced by the horribly artificial.

When Neil Gaiman was commissioned to resurrect an old DC Comics superhero called the Sandman he threw away the immediate model and went back to the original – which he filled out with a whole series of Hoffmannesque twists. *The Sandman Book of Dreams* edited by Gaiman and Ed Kramer (Voyager, £16.99) is an anthology of stories set against the background of the Sandman graphic novels. It differs from other tie-in collections set "in the world of..." because the world of Gaiman's Sandman is, of course, *the* world, gifted with an additional allegorical superstructure in which Dream, Death, Desire and their less fashionable kindred may make personal appearances.

Given that Desire, Death and – above all else – Dream are the levers of all narrative there is no story

The Legacies of Coppelius

Brian Stableford

which is not *tacitly* set in the Sandman cosmos, and there are several stories here which are content to let their allegorical apparatus remain tacit. Insofar as they form any kind of a set, partaking of some mysterious Gaimanistic essence, they do so by cultivating a particular kind of irony which, although not straightforwardly Hoffmannesque, is in a definite line of descent from the confused and confusing machinations of Coppelius.

We see this productive confusion most clearly in "Seven Nights in

Slumberland" by George Alec Effinger, "Ain't You Most Done" by Gene Wolfe, and the magnificent "Stopp't Clock Yard" by Susanna Clarke, which rightly takes pride of place in the book, even over first-rate stories by more famous names. Those stories which could have appeared anywhere else – despite their explicit use of Gaiman's instruments – and which remain quintessential products of their particular authors in spite of that use also partake of it, albeit in a subtler manner. John M. Ford's compelling "Chain Home, Low" and Lisa Goldstein's typically delicate "Stronger than Desire" acquire an extra nightmarish edge by virtue of their context. It is good to know that a fantasy collection of this quality and this sophistication will reach a large audience by virtue of its association with the graphic novels, but no one who is unfamiliar with the graphic novels (as I was before picking it up) should pass over it.

Quite a few of the stories in Ray Bradbury's *Quicker than the Eye* (Avon, \$22) could have been dropped into *The Sandman Book of Dreams* without seeming out of place, especially such bombastic tales of

dreams run wild as "Dorian in Excelsus," which explains what became of Dorian Gray's picture, or "Last Rites," which also features St Oscar in a cameo. The decidedly Hoffmannesque "Unterder-seaboat Doktor," about a psychiatrist with a troubled history, would also fit in nicely. Even the nostalgia-drenched tales dripping with sickly sentimentality, like "Remember Sascha?", "That Woman on the Lawn" and "No News, or What Killed the Dog?", which only Bradbury does the way Bradbury does them, have to be filed under Desire – and you can hear Death laughing all the way through the amiably ludicrous tale of "The Very Gentle Murders."

Even at his most dreamy and dewy-eyed, however, Bradbury never retreats into the kind of indiscriminate hatred of the artificial that consumed the luckless protagonist of Hoffmann's "The Sandman." Whatever "The Other Highway" might have to say about city life, its message has to be counterbalanced against that of "The Ghost in the Machine," a tale of eccentric invention which takes care to remind us that there is progress and Progress, and that you have to be able to tell which is which. That is why Bradbury, no matter how far he strays from the sf fold, still remains One of Us.

There is a much more honest Hoffmannesque horror in the visionary fantasies of S. Fowler Wright (1874-1965), whose briefer examples were first collected in *The New Gods Lead* in 1932, given a second lease of life by Arkham House in the slightly-augmented *The Throne of Saturn* in 1949 and are back in print again in the even-more-slightly-augmented *S. Fowler Wright's Short Stories* (FWB, P.O. Box 3, Ludlow, SY8 4ZZ, no price shown). The book is a kind of trailer for a vast undertaking by Fowler Wright's grandson which will make the entire corpus of his published and unpublished writings available on the Internet (at <http://www.sfw.org.uk>) to anyone who cares to look at it.

In an age when huge sections of the literary heritage of the 20th century are vanishing through neglect, this pioneering conservation exercise is worthy of every respect in its own right, and as an excellent example to others. S. Fowler Wright was always prepared to publish his own work when no one else would do it – and that determination placed several eccentric masterpieces on the record of scientific romance – and it is good to see that he managed to pass his methodical stubbornness on to future generations. Given the content of his corrosively Hoffmannesque parable

"Automata" it is unclear that he would have approved of the Internet, but I am sure that if he could be fully acquainted with the significance of his grandson's endeavour he would have been glad to agree with Ray Bradbury that there is progress and Progress, and that there are other historical destinations available to modern man than the inglorious dead-ends mapped in "P.N. 40" and "Original Sin." Given a brief personal appearance by Desire or Death, "The Rat" and "Choice" could have been easily accommodated in *The Sandman Book of Dreams*; they were clearly written under the paradoxical influence of Lord Morpheus at his most earnestly perverse.

Everyone and his cousin – including Sigmund Freud – has had a shot at analysing the meaning and intention of "The Sandman," and they all disagree about it. Personally, I think Coppelius was fitted up by a sly author and a silly protagonist; I think he was on the side of the angels, and was demonized only because the ignorant cannot tell progress from Progress – but it remains an open question, and that's why short-story collections like these still repay reading (in spite of their unfashionability in the marketplace), and probably always will.

Brian Stableford

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The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from back covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anthony, Piers, and Alfred Tella. **The Willing Spirit**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86266-0, 287pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; co-author Tella is unfamiliar to us, but we are informed that he has written an earlier novel, *Sundered Soul* [1990].) December 1996.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Chronicles of the Holy Grail**. Raven, ISBN 1-85487-433-0, xix+440pp, B-format paperback, cover by Julek Heller, £5.99. (Arthurian fantasy anthology, first edition; the fourth volume of a series – its predecessors were *The Pendragon Chronicles* [1990], *The Camelot Chronicles* [1992] and *The Merlin Chronicles* [1995] – in which Ashley brings together a wide range of fiction on the ever-fascinating Grail-quest theme; it contains original stories by Cherith Baldry, Peter T. Garratt, Phyllis Ann Karr, Steve Lockley, F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre, Darrell Schweitzer, Brian Stableford, Keith Taylor, Peter Valentine Timlett, Peter Tremayne and others; among the reprinted stories are pieces by Parke Godwin, Tanith Lee, Arthur Machen, George Moore and Arthur Quiller-Couch; recommended.) 18th November 1996.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Chronicles of the Holy Grail**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0363-6, xix+440pp, B-format paperback, cover by Julek Heller, \$12.95. (Arthurian fantasy anthology, first published in the UK, 1996; identical to the Raven volume, above.) November 1996.

Attanasio, A. A. **The Dark Shore**. "The magnificent epic fantasy." New English Library, ISBN 0-340-64947-X, x+500pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick van Houten, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 111.) 21st November 1996.

Baxter, Stephen. **Voyage**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224616-3, viii+591pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £16.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition; originally announced as *Ares* [a title which was changed at the last moment], this is Baxter's "American" blockbuster, about a timeline in which JFK survived an assassination attempt in 1963 and went on to inspire NASA to undertake a manned Mars mission in 1986.) 21st November 1996.

Beagle, Peter S. **The Unicorn Sonata**. Illustrated by Robert Rodriguez. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1943-5, 154pp, hardcover, cover by Rodriguez, £9.99. (Fantasy novella, first published in the USA, 1996; this is a gift-book type of thing, with a slim but attractive text and full-

colour illustrations which are kind of appealing but just a bit naff; it's not a sequel to Beagle's *The Lost Unicorn* [1968], although the title is obviously meant to evoke that famous book's charms.) 14th November 1996.

Belle, Pamela. **Blood Imperial**. "The third part of the Silver City Trilogy." Pan, ISBN 0-330-34653-9, 417pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tim Gill, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996.) 8th November 1996.

Bishop, Michael. **At the City Limits of Fate**. Edgewood Press [PO Box 380264, Cambridge, MA 02238, USA], ISBN 0-9629066-6-2, 328pp, trade paperback, cover by Rick Berry, \$14. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains 15 stories, all from the 1980s and 1990s, several of them reprinted from *Omni* and most of the others from original anthologies [including a number of White Wolf books that we generally don't get to see in this country]; it's a distinguished-looking collection; the back cover carries commendations from Greg Bear, Karen Joy Fowler, Elizabeth Hand and James Morrow.) No date shown: received in October 1996.

Bova, Ben. **Moonrise: Book I of the Moonbase Saga**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68248-5, 613pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1996; another near-future blockbuster, which attempts to do for the moon what *Mars* did for Mars; the author's previous novel, *Brothers*, was not sent to us for review.) 7th November 1996.

Bradbury, Ray. **The October Country**. Illustrated by Joe Mugnaini. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40785-7, viii+306pp, B-format paperback, cover by Janet Woolley, \$10. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1955; this edition has a new four-page introduction by the author; containing many of his early *Weird Tales* stories, it's still one of Bradbury's best books [and the Mugnaini illustrations still seem perfect].) 1st October 1996.

Caveney, Philip. **Bad to the Bone**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1773-4, 281pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 14th November 1996.

Chadbourne, Mark. **The Eternal Vista**. ISBN 0-575-60062-4, 381pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996.) 10th October 1996.

Cooper, Louise. **The King's Demon**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1715-7, 314pp, hardcover, cover by J. Sullivan, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 14th November 1996.

De Lint, Charles. **Trader**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85847-7, 352pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) January 1997.

Donnelly, Joe. **Twitchy Eyes**. Michael Joseph, ISBN 0-7181-3980-1, 444pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 30th January 1997.

Dorsey, Candace Jane. **Black Wine**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86181-8, 288pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel by this Canadian writer who has become well known for her

short stories, poetry and publishing activities; the publishers are pushing this book as strongly feminist, in the vein of Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas.) January 1997.

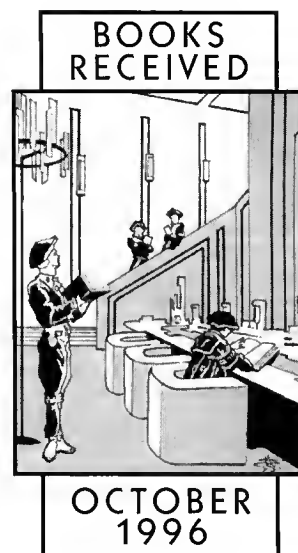
Douglas, John. **Zoo Event**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66052-X, 311pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; the author's fourth novel.) Late entry: 19th September publication, received in October 1996.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Best New Science Fiction: 9th Annual Collection**. Raven, ISBN 1-85487-492-6, lxiii+687pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Thirteenth Annual Collection*, 1996; surprise! – we had thought Robinson/Raven had ceased publishing these Dozois anthologies in Britain some years ago, but it seems they have been doing them all along, on the quiet, without sending us review copies; the retitling [and re-numbering] is tremendously confusing, but otherwise we're glad to see these fine anthologies appearing over here; this one is reviewed [under its American title] by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in this issue of *Interzone*.) 21st October 1996.

Dozois, Gardner, and Sheila Williams, eds. **Isaac Asimov's Vampires**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00387-7, 257pp, A-format paperback, cover by Den Beauvais, \$5.50. (Horror anthology, first edition; it consists of eight vampire stories reprinted from *Asimov's SF* magazine – by Pat Cadigan, Tanith Lee, Susan Palwick, David Redd, Connie Willis and others.) 1st November 1996.

Fearn, John Russell. **Aftermath: A Science Fiction Classic**. Introduction by Philip Harbottle. Gryphon [PO Box 209, Brooklyn, NY 11228-0209, USA], ISBN 0-936071-76-1, 114pp, small-press paperback [with dustjacket], cover by Ron Turner, \$15 [plus \$2 postage and packing]. (Sf collection, first edition; this consists of a short novel, "Aftermath," first published in *Startling Stories* in 1945, and a short story, "After the Atom," from the same venue, 1948; in days gone by commercial publishers like Ace Books and DAW Books used to churn out loads of antiquated pulp of this sort [with occasional "quality paperbacks"] from more upmarket companies such as Dover Publications, but nobody seems to be doing it any more; so Gryphon Publications are performing a useful service for those readers interested in the byways of sf's history; that said, I rather wish publisher Gary Lovisi of Gryphon would concentrate less on British pulp authors such as Fearn and give us some of the more interesting but hitherto unreprinted American stuff; how about a world first edition of Miles J. Breuer's "Paradise and Iron" [Amoing Quarterly, Summer 1930], Mr Lovisi?) November 1996.

Feintuch, David. **Midshipman's Hope**. "The First Voyage in the Seafort Saga." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-434-0, 391pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Youll, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; this was the author's debut novel, though he has written at least three more since; we've heard the



phrase "Hornblower in space" often enough in the past [it used to be applied to the sf novels of A. Bertram Chandler, and more recently to those of Lois McMaster Bujold] but this one really does seem to fit the description; C. J. Cherryh, David Gerrold and other worthies commend it.) 7th November 1996.

Goodkind, Terry. **Stone of Tears: Book Two of The Sword of Truth**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-305-X, 1056pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 103.) 4th November 1996.

Green, Terence M. **Blue Limbo**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86282-2, 253pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; billed as "a futuristic Dirty Harry," this is by a Canadian author who wrote a novel of similar type a number of years ago, *Barking Dogs* [1988].) January 1997.

Griffith, Nicola. **Slow River**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39537-9, 344pp, B-format paperback, \$11. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 100; like Griffith's first novel, *Ammonite*, this one won a Lambda Literary Award for "Lesbian and Gay literary excellence.") Late entry: 8th August publication, received in October 1996.

Halperin, James L. **The Truth Machine**. "A speculative novel." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41056-4, vi+321pp, hardcover, \$24. (Sf novel, first trade edition [it was originally self-published by the author in slightly different form earlier in 1996]; although it's published by Ballantine Books under that quintessential genre imprint name, Del Rey, this debut novel by a new American writer appears to be a work of "mainstream sf" – i.e. it's a serious-minded futuristic utopian fiction aimed at the non-genre audience.) Late entry: 1st September publication, received in October 1996.

Harper, Tara K. **Grayheart**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38053-3, 339pp, A-format paperback, cover by Eric Peterson, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it appears to be the



fourth in this author's "Tales of the Wolves" series.) *Lote entry: 1st August publication, received in October 1996.*

Heinlein, Robert A. **Tramp Royale.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00409-1, 372pp, C-format paperback, cover by Kirk Reinert, \$15. (Autobiographical travel book by the major American sf writer; first published in the USA, 1992; the author's last book, written in the 1950s but not published until four years after his death; this is unlikely ever to see a British edition, so Heinlein completists should buy it in this attractive Ace format.) *1st November 1996.*

Herbert, James. **48.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224287-7, 330pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Alternative-history horror novel, first edition; it's set in a 1948 that never was, after Hitler has devastated Britain with something called the Blood Death; according to the back-flap blurb, Herbert's books "have sold more than 37 million copies worldwide.") *7th November 1996.*

James, Peter. **Getting Wired!: A TechnoTerrors Story.** Illustrated by Derek Brazell. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06307-6, 128pp, hardcover, cover by Brazell, £9.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; the well-known horror novelist's first book for kids.) *31st October 1996.*

Jones, Gwyneth. **Phoenix Café.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06068-9, 298pp, hardcover, cover by David Farren, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to the author's highly-praised *White Queen* and *North Wind*, set in 23rd-century Paris.) *20th January 1997.*

Jones, J. V. **A Man Betrayed.** "The Book of Words, Volume II." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-402-2, \$98pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; J. V. Jones [Julie Victoria Jones, not to be confused with Jenny Jones] is a new British author; born 1963, now living in California.) *7th November 1996.*

Jones, Richard Glyn and A. Susan Williams, eds. **The Penguin Book of Erotic Stories by Women.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-024531-6, xiv+400pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sexual fiction anthology, containing some fantasy; first published in 1995; it contains mainly reprint stories by Kathy Acker, Isabel Allende, Angela Carter, Kate Chopin, Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, Candas Jane Dorsey, Carol Emshwiller, Katherine Mansfield, Ann Oakley, Joanna Russ, May Sinclair, Edith Wharton and many others; much of the writing, though up to a century old, is startlingly erotic – who would have thought Edith Wharton would write something like *that*!) *No date shown: received in October 1996.*

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: Volume Seven.** Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0372-5, xi+S92pp, B-format paperback, cover by Luis Rey, \$10.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK as *The Best New Horror: Volume Seven*, 1996; it contains reprint stories by Alan Brennert, Ramsey Campbell, Terry Dowling, Christopher Fowler, Neil

Gaiman, Stephen Gallagher, Thomas Ligotti, Paul J. McAuley, Ian R. MacLeod, Graham Masterton, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, Lisa Tuttle, Cherry Wilder and others, including the short novel "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires" by Brian Stableford [from *Interzone*].) *November 1996.*

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Dark Terrors: The Gollancz Book of Horror.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60024-1, 379pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1995; it contains all-new stories by Christopher Fowler, Graham Masterton, Richard Christian Matheson, Mark Morris, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, Karl Edward Wagner, etc., plus reprints by Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley and Peter Straub; reviewed by Pete CRowther in *Interzone* 108.) *31st October 1996.*

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **The Giant Book of Fantasy Tales.** The Book Company [9/9-13 Winbourne Rd., Brookvale 2100, Sydney, NSW, Australia], ISBN 1-86309-224-2, xx+SS3pp, C-format paperback, cover by J. K. Potter, no price shown. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; it states inside: "This omnibus selection [sic] originally published in different form as *Fantasy Tales* 1-7," 1988-1991; so, figure it out: is this a selection from those seven issues of Jones and Sutton's now-defunct magazine/anthology series, or is it an omnibus of all of them?; the latter is possible, as it's a bulky volume; it was sent to us by Robinson Publishing, with another mysterious note, saying: "This edition is currently only available in Australia, but will hopefully be published in the UK at a later date"; why the "hopefully"? – don't they know by now if they're going to publish it here, especially as they have gone so far as to send out UK review copies?) *No date shown: received in October 1996.*

Joshi, S. T. H. P. **Lovecraft: A Life.** Necronomic Press, ISBN 0-94088-488-7, xii+704pp, C-format paperback, \$20. (Biography of the great horror writer; first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at \$40 [not seen]; a really definitive work, which supercedes L. Sprague de Camp's relatively skimpy effort *Lovecraft: A Biography* (1975), this was a massive undertaking for the prolific and scholarly Joshi, and, as with all his work, he seems to have carried it off well.) *October 1996.*

Kessel, John. **Corrupting Dr Nice.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86116-8, 316pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's dedicated to various 1930s and 1940s directors of Hollywood screwball comedies ["and, most especially, in admiration for his genius, to Preston Sturges"]; and it has a formidable array of the author's friends praising it on the back cover: Connie Willis, Ursula Le Guin, Jonathan Lethem and Kim Stanley Robinson, the last of whom opines that this is "the best time travel novel ever written"; worth a look, evidently.) *January 1997.*

Lackey, Mercedes. **Storm Breaking.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-275-4, 435pp, C-format paperback, cover by John Barber, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it's the third book in the "Mage Storms" trilogy; it contains black-and-white illustrations throughout, though the publishers don't tell us who did them – the author's husband, Larry Dixon?) *7th October 1996.*

Laws, Stephen. **Somewhere South of Midnight.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66609-9, 439pp, hardcover, cover by Jon Blake, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) *3rd October 1996.*

Le Guin, Ursula K. **A Fisherman of the Inland Sea: Science Fiction Stories.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06324-6, 191pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £15.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1994; eight recent stories, plus an elegant introduction, by one of sf's greatest modern authors; it's good to see her back, her work as wise and beautiful as ever.) *28th November 1996.*

McDevitt, Jack. **Ancient Shores.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648228-7, 397pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the author's fourth novel, about a man in the American midwest who digs up a 10,000-year-old sailing ship made of alien materials; it sounds seductively Simakian, in content if not in style.) *4th November 1996.*

McDonald, Ian. **Sacrifice of Fools.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06075-1, 286pp, hardcover, cover by Mike Posen, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the blurb describes it as "part murder mystery, part science fiction thriller and a wholly engrossing satire on the situation in Northern Ireland.") *28th November 1996.*

Marley, Louise. **Sing the Warmth.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00386-9, 298pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Marley is a new name to us, but this appears to be her second novel, a follow-up to *Sing the Light*; it's in the planetary romance vein, and concerns music; Greg Bear praises it.) *1st November 1996.*

May, Julian. **Sky Trillium.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38000-2, 389pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; fifth in the "Trillium" series, apparently initiated by May but other parts of which have been written by Marion Zimmer Bradley and Andre Norton.) *November 1996.*

Michaels, Barbara. **The Walker in Shadows.** Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4924-7, 308pp, hardcover, cover by Derek Colligan, £16.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1979.) *7th November 1996.*

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The Soprano Sorceress.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86022-6, 509pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this one kicks off a new series for Modesitt, who has become a remarkably prolific purveyor of both sf and fantasy.) *February 1997.*

Monahan, Brent. **The Uprising.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-67168-8, 246pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) *3rd October 1996.*

Nasaw, Jonathan. **The World on Blood.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-67447-4, 361pp, A-format paperback, cover by George Underwood, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) *21st November 1996.*

Nichols, Nichelle, with Margaret Wander Bonano. **Saturn's Child.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00384-2, 342pp, A-format paperback, cover by Michael Herring, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; by the famous *Star Trek* actress, although it is not a *Trek* spinoff; like the William Shatner books [with Ron Goulart], this is an example of the sf "celebrity novel": if Joan Collins can write novels, if tennis-players and supermodels can do likewise, why not Ms Nichols?) *1st November 1996.*

Noon, Jeff. **Pollen.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33882-X, 327pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 100.) *8th November 1996.*

Pepper, Mark. **The Short Cut.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68220-5, 230pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new British writer; born 1966.) *7th November 1996.*

Phillips, Robert, ed. **The Omnibus of 20th Century Ghost Stories.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-113-7, viii+374pp, C-format paperback, cover by Stanley Spencer, £7.99. (Ghost-story anthology, first published in the USA as *Trumpet of the Night*, 1989; although we haven't seen it before, this book was first published in the UK as a Robinson hardcover in 1990 and as a paperback in 1992, and is now reissued; it contains reprint stories by mainly "literary" names: Gertrude Atherton, Louis Auchincloss, Elizabeth Bowen, Truman Capote, E. M. Forster, Graham Greene, Henry James, Jean Rhys, Muriel Spark, Dylan Thomas, John Updike, Denton Welch, Edith Wharton, Tennessee Williams, Virginia Woolf and others; given such exalted mainstream company, it's a surprise to see sf writer Barry Malzberg's name in there too.) *21st October 1996.*

Russell, Jay. **Blood.** Raven, ISBN 1-85487-466-7, 277pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a second novel by this British-resident American writer [born 1961].) *21st October 1996.*

Shelley, Rick. **The Fires of Coventry.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00385-0, 312pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a tale of interstellar war; it's the first novel by this author we have seen, but it's at least his fifth; it's dedicated to Stanley Schmidt, "For starting it all," so presumably Shelley is an Analog author.) *1st November 1996.*

Spruill, Steven. **Daughter of Darkness.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-64941-0, 312pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is

presumably a follow-up to the similarly-titled *Rulers of Dorkness* [1995].) 7th November 1996.

Tubb, E. C. **Kalgan the Golden: Science Fiction Stories**. Edited, with an introduction, by Philip Harbottle. Gryphon [PO Box 209, Brooklyn, NY 11228-0209, USA], ISBN 0-936071-75-3, 112pp, small-press paperback [with dustjacket], cover by Ron Turner, \$15 [plus \$2 postage and packing]. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains six previously uncollected early Tubb stories, all from British sf magazines of the period 1953-55; recommended to anyone nostalgic for the lesser sf of the 1950s.) October 1996.

Tyson, Salinda. **Wheel of Dreams**. "Del Rey Discovery." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39430-S, 311pp, A-format paperback, cover

Allen, Roger McBride. **Isaac Asimov's Utopia**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00245-S, 351pp, C-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$13. (Sf sharecrop novel, first published in the UK, 1996; third in the trilogy begun with *Isoac Asimov's Caliban* and *Isoac Asimov's Inferno*, it's copyright Byron Preiss Visual Publications Inc.; it seems the Orion/Millennium edition of three months earlier was a world first.) 1st November 1996.

Archer, Simon, and Stan Nicholls. **Gerry Anderson: The Authorised Biography**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-978141-7, 228pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Biography of the British TV sf-series producer, first edition; co-author Archer died in a car crash in 1993, and Nicholls finished the book.) 18th October 1996.

Duelist Magazine, Editors of. **Magic: The Gathering. Official Encyclopedia: The Complete Card Guide**. Foreword by Richard Garfield. Carlton Books, ISBN 1-85868-240-1, 222pp, large-format paperback, £14.99. (Copiously-illustrated guide to the fantasy gaming-cards issued by Wizards of the Coast, Inc; first edition.) 26th October 1996.

Edwards, Ted. **X-Files Confidential: The Unauthorized X-Files Compendium**. Foreword by Jeff Rice. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-88181-3, xv+282pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated companion to the sf/horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first published in the USA, 1996; there have been many books about this TV series, and this one seems as good as, or better than, most; although it's "unofficial," the publishers claim to have "information provided by our very own Deep Throat - a producer on the show who is providing unprecedented access.") 7th November 1996.

Golden, Christopher. **Sanctuary: Mutant Empire, Book 2**. "X-Men." Illustrated by Rick Leonardi and Terry Austin. Boulevard, ISBN 1-57297-180-0, vi+34Spp, A-format paperback, cover by Ray Lago, \$5.99. (Sf comics-spinoff novel, first edition; a "Byron Preiss Multimedia Company, Inc" packaged book, based on the Marvel Comics characters.) 1st November 1996.

by Michael Kaluta, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's a debut book by a new American writer.) Late entry: 1st August publication, received in October 1996.

Weaver, Tom. **It Came from Weaver Five: Interviews with 20 Zany, Glib and Earnest Moviemakers in the SF and Horror Traditions of the Thirties, Forties, Fifties and Sixties**. McFarland [distributed in Britain by Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN], ISBN 0-7864-0191-S, ix+386pp, hardcover, £34.65. (Illustrated collection of interviews with sf/horror film directors, actors and other personnel; first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American edition with a British price added; most of the material is reprinted from magazines such as

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

Grant, Rob. **Backwards**. "Red Dwarf." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-017150-9, 342pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1996; a spinoff from the TV sitcom created by the author and his "erstwhile partner" [as he calls him] Doug Naylor; the first two *Red Dwarf* novels were by "Grant Naylor;" the third [which we never saw] was by Naylor alone, and now this fourth is by Grant alone.) 7th November 1996.

Harrison, Taylor, Sarah Projansky, Kent A. Ono and Elyce Rae Helford, eds. **Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek**. Westview Press [12 Hid's Copse Rd., Oxford OX2 9JJ], ISBN 0-8133-2899-3, x+303pp, trade paperback, cover by James Wappel, £11. (Anthology of academic essays on the sf TV series *Star Trek* and the phenomena surrounding it; first published in the USA, 1996; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at, gulp, £51.50 [not seen]; this is the American first edition with a UK price added; with serious articles by various academics [mainly women], the best-known of whom is Marleen S. Barr, this looks as though it may be the first interesting book about *Trek*.) October 1996.

Jeter, K. W. **Blade Runner 3: Replicant Night**. Orion, ISBN 1-85798-420-X, 309pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Spinoff sf novel, a sequel by another hand to Philip K. Dick's *Da Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and to the 1982 film based on it, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* [title courtesy of the late Alan E. Nourse]; first published in the USA, 1996.) 7th October 1996.

Jones, Matthew. **Bad Therapy**. "Doctor Who: The New Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20490-5, 292pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salowski, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new British writer, it's

Storlog and *Fongorio*; interviewees here include some pretty obscure people, of whom by far and away the best-known is director Robert Wise [*The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Andromeda Strain*, etc]; like the author's four earlier books of interviews [*They Fought in the Creature Features*, *Attack of the Monster Movie Makers*, etc] this is minor fun for sf film enthusiasts.) 19th December 1996.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Sentinels: Starshield, Book One**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39760-6, vi+421pp, hardcover, \$24. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; like the various books the authors have written solo in recent years, this appears to be a fantasy-tinged space opera in sub-*Star Wars* vein.) November 1996.

set in 1950s London.) 5th December 1996.

Kidd, Chip. **Batman Collected**. Photographs by Geoff Spear. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-726-4, 276pp, hardcover, £29.99. (Lavishly illustrated guide to "Batman" collectibles [toys, memorabilia, etc]; first published in the USA, 1996; it's copy-right DC Comics; this is a big, heavy, well-designed, extravagant book about utter trivia: does the world need it? - at least it serves as testimony to Batman's enduring popularity.) 7th November 1996.

Nimoy, Leonard. **I Am Spock**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-964741-9, x+356pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Autobiography of the actor who starred as the Vulcan Mr Spock in the original *Star Trek* TV series of the 1960s; first published in the USA, 1995.) 10th October 1996.

Norton, Andre, and Sherwood Smith. **Derelict for Trade: A Great New Solar Queen Adventure**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85919-8, 283pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; although billed as a collaboration, this is probably a sharecrop [the one-paragraph preface is signed by Smith alone]; it's a sequel to Norton's juvenile novel *Sorgosso of Spoce* [1955; as by "Andrew North"]; etc; it's not mentioned here, but there was an earlier "Solar Queen" sharecrop, *Redline the Stars* [1993], by P. M. Griffin; "Sherwood Smith" is a pseudonym of Christine Lowentroun [born 1951] who has also written under various other names.) February 1997.

Parkin, Lance. **Cold Fusion**. "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20489-3, 293pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 5th December 1996.

Pertwee, Jon, and David J. Howe. **I Am the Doctor: Jon Pertwee's**

Wolfe, Gene. **Exodus from the Long Sun: The Fourth Volume of The Book of the Long Sun**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-63835-4, 386pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the final "Long Sun" novel; although we received it long after the American proof, this UK edition seems to precede the American one, which was scheduled for November; reviewed [from the US proof] by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 114.) 3rd October 1996.

Wolverton, Dave. **Lords of the Seventh Swarm**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85771-3, 348pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *The Golden Queen* and *Beyond the Gate* in a *Star Wars*-lookalike space-opera series.) January 1997.

Final Memoir. Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 1-85227-621-S, 128pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Copiously illustrated, large-format volume of reminiscences by the late actor who starred in the *Doctor Who* BBC TV series in the early 1970s; first edition.) 21st November 1996.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **The New Rebellion**. "Star Wars." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04084-8, 383pp, hardcover, cover by Drew Struzan, £12.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 14th November 1996.

Scarborough, Elizabeth Ann. **Carol for Another Christmas**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00366-4, 200pp, hardcover, cover by Doron Ben-Ami, \$18. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's a sequel, of sorts, to Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, set in present-day America but involving a visitation by Scrooge's ghost.) 1st November 1996.

Schuster, Hal, and Wendy Rathbone. **Trek: The Unauthorized A-Z**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648290-2, 576pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Alphabetical who's who and what's what of the various *Star Trek* TV series and films; first published in the USA, 1994; it's a beefy, unillustrated volume, but unfortunately it's two years out of date [no mention of *Star Trek: Voyager*] and it's not as good as it should be in its presentation of information; there are no dates of birth, and precious little other data, for persons such as James Blish, D. C. Fontana and numerous other writers and second-string actors; although it lists spinoff novels, again, there are no dates of publication, which makes it fairly useless bibliographically; *The Gillis Guide to Trek*, listed here three months ago, is much better in terms of its density of hard information [although it doesn't attempt to cover spinoff novels].) 4th November 1996.

Williamson, Chet. **The Crow: City of Angels**. Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-2257-0, 250pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy movie novelization; first published in the USA, 1996; it's based on a screenplay by David S. Goyer, which in turn was based a comic book by James O'Barr.) 22nd November 1996.



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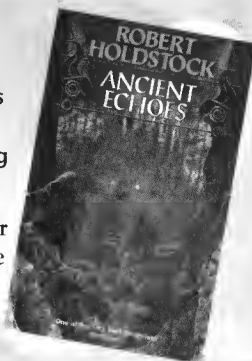
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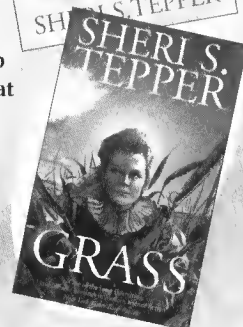
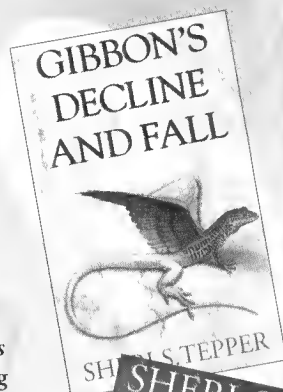


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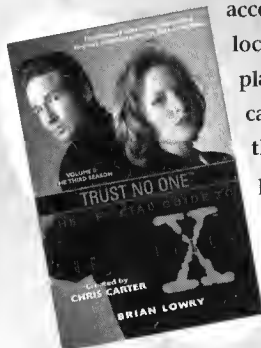
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